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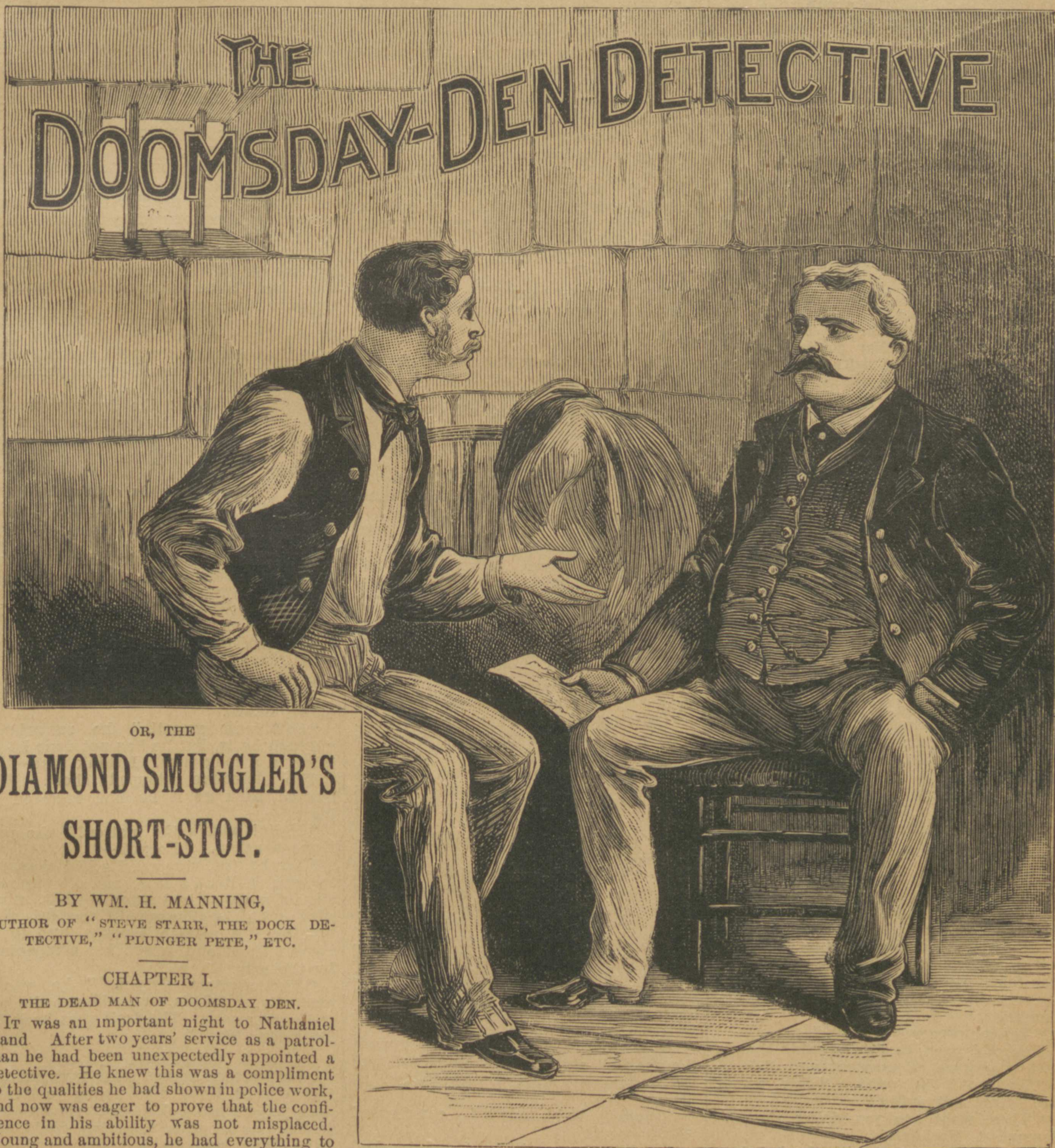
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OR, THE DIAMOND SMUGGLER'S SHORT-STOP.

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AUTHOR OF "STEVE STARR, THE DOCK DE-
TECTIVE," "PLUNGER PETE," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE DEAD MAN OF DOOMSDAY DEN.

It was an important night to Nathaniel Rand. After two years' service as a patrolman he had been unexpectedly appointed a detective. He knew this was a compliment to the qualities he had shown in police work, and now was eager to prove that the confidence in his ability was not misplaced. Young and ambitious, he had everything to gain.

"I AM AN INNOCENT MAN!" THE PRISONER DECLARED.

He mused on his present assignment as he walked along.

"I am to arrest Lucas Hammond, suspected of being a diamond smuggler. It is known that he went to the house of Professor Jonathan Case, better known as Doomsday Den. My orders were to seize Hammond at early dawn. I will take no chances; I will shadow the house through the remaining hours of the night, be all ready, and make sure he does not depart secretly from Case's house."

The detective looked up at a neighboring clock.

"Ten minutes past three. I suppose a veteran in this work would laugh at me for remaining on watch in the street as I shall do, but I must not fail in this, my first case. I'll watch sharp. I shall know the diamond smuggler because he wears a butternut-colored suit."

The speaker turned a corner.

"Hallo! what is going on here?"

He had seen a group of men by a building not far away, and their manner told of excitement there. One of them was a policeman in uniform.

Nathaniel pressed forward hurriedly. It was less than a block from the house of Jonathan Case.

Quickly he joined the group. "What is wrong?" he demanded.

"Look for yourself," laconically replied the policeman—"a man prostrate on the sidewalk."

"Drunk or injured?"

"He is dead—has been murdered."

"Murdered?"

Rand repeated the word with a start. Then he pressed forward further.

The body lay partially in a deep doorway, and the position carried conviction to Nathaniel's mind.

"How do you know it was murder?" he asked of the officer.

"There is a deep wound on the back of the head, not made by a bullet, but probably by a club."

"Who found him?"

"All of us together. These are friends of mine. They joined me on my beat and walked with me. When we reached this point we saw the man as you see him now. It was but a few minutes ago."

"You did not see the murderer?"

"No; no one saw him, as far as we know."

"Have you searched?"

"Where should I search?"

"The dead man lies partly within this vestibule. It is absurd, perhaps, to believe any evidence might be found within, but we should look. We must begin investigation right here and now."

The patrolman had been answering questions mechanically, being a good deal disturbed by the tragedy, but there had been a reflection on his sagacity, he thought. He now asked gruffly:

"Who are you?"

"Nathaniel Rand, a detective."

With this explanation, modestly made, the detective placed his hand on the body. The fallen man was blocking the door of the vestibule, and Rand moved him slightly back. Then suddenly he started back.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, "who are you?"

"Who is who?" asked the patrolman.

He did not understand, but was quickly answered, for Nathaniel reached forward and dragged a man forth into view—a young man, tall and slender. He was respectably dressed, and his appearance was not against him.

The circumstances under which he was found were against him, and one of the citizens burst forth with the exclamation:

"The murderer is found!"

The stranger threw out his hands with a gesture of eloquent appeal.

"No, no!" he cried. "You wrong me! I am not guilty."

"Then what are you doing there?" demanded Nathaniel.

The man's eyes fell with the hopeless motion of one who has no visible hope. "Nothing wrong," he answered.

"Then you will find no trouble in explaining why you were here."

"Is that a crime?"

"With this dead man by your side, it at least points to a knowledge of the crime."

"It was chance—no more. I was passing by; I saw him lying here; I investigated in a friendly spirit."

"Investigated his pockets, I reckon!" put in the patrolman.

The accused man started confusedly and one of his hands moved quickly as if to shelter itself behind his back. Nathaniel grasped the hand, wrested something away and held it up where all could see.

"A diamond pin!" he exclaimed.

The stone, a fine specimen of its kind, glittered brightly in the lamp-light, sending out angry little sparks of red, blue and white. It was like an accusing spirit to the accused man.

He stared hard at it, still confused and frightened.

"Perhaps you can account for this," added Nathaniel.

"It is mine."

"You take a singular place to carry it."

"It—it dropped off—"

He raised his hand to his neck, where the loosely tied, flimsy band made about as poor a place to wear such a thing as could be imagined. The patrolman uttered a sound of impatience.

"Why should we listen to this fellow?" he demanded. "All goes to prove his guilt; we cannot doubt it. If you are a detective, sir, do you take the prisoner to Headquarters, while —"

"No, no!" implored the stranger. "You will do a great wrong if you do. I am innocent; I swear it. Let me go, and I will forever bless you. It will be only justice—"

"Prove it!" Nathaniel broke in.

"How?"

"What is your name?"

Again the eyes of the prisoner fell.

"I cannot tell you sir," he faltered.

"Why?"

"There are things that forbid it."

"Do you live near here?"

"No. In Albany."

The detective plucked off the stranger's hat.

"Made by a Bowery dealer," he commented, after a look inside. "You buy your wearing apparel in this city; you are a New Yorker. For the last time, have you anything to say?"

The prisoner hesitated. His face twitched nervously; he was plainly in deep mental distress. More, he did not seem to know how to act. For a brief space he was silent; then he burst forth in speech once more.

"Spare me, spare me!" he implored. "I am innocent of all crime. I swear it! If you molest me you will do a great wrong. I beg of you—I implore you, let me go free. I have done nothing."

"Circumstances are against you, then. Even if you have done no harm to this dead man you had a diamond pin which I cannot believe to have been yours. I can use no discretion; I must take you to my superiors and let them deal with you."

The stranger's head dropped.

"Lost!"

The single word escaped his lips. It was with the accent of despair. He seemed to give up all hope then.

Another voice sounded behind them. It was the roundsman of the district, and, as he knew Nathaniel Rand, it needed but little explanation to make him understand the situation and agree upon a plan in conjunction with the detective.

He started with the prisoner toward the precinct station, and Nathaniel was left in charge, with the patrolman as his assistant.

"Caught red-handed!" commented the bluecoat.

The detective again bent and touched the lifeless man.

"I doubt it."

"Why?"

"This unknown has been dead for hours. The prisoner may have guilty knowledge of his taking off, but the deed has not been freshly done. All animal warmth is gone from this clay."

"I did not notice it."

"Examine and you will find it so."

"Then why is he here?"

"That is, indeed, mysterious. It does not seem that he could long lie here and not be discovered. He may have been brought to this point from some other spot, where he was slain."

"A rich man, decoyed and robbed, I suppose."

"I do not so regard it. His clothes seem rough to my touch. We want a better view than this dark spot affords. The light is imperfect. I do not wish to move him. Can't you get a lantern near here?"

"Easily! There is a stable but a short distance off."

"Go there, if you please."

The policeman hastened off. There was no work Rand could do while he was waiting, so he stood erect and turned his gaze toward the east. Half-way down the block he saw a house which interested him a good deal. It was that to which his mind had turned when he was on his way to the place.

He knew it was the home of Professor Jonathan Case, and that, on account of its extreme age, it was facetiously styled Doomsday Den. It was to this house he had been directed to go in the morning, but which his zeal had led him to decide to watch before day to prevent an escape.

"Luckily," he thought, "I am so near that I can leave at a moment's notice and hasten to my regular duty. In the meanwhile I can attend to this and still reach there at the time directed. After all, this is my first real case as a detective, not the other. Never mind! I will look for Lucas Hammond, diamond smuggler, later on."

There was a glimmer of stronger light on the other end of the block, and the patrolman hurried up with the lantern.

"This will give us closer inspection," he remarked.

Nathaniel caught the lantern away. The limbs of the lifeless man were in full light; the detective proceeded to throw the lantern's gleam upon his upper body and face.

The view was quickly obtained.

"Hallo!" cried the policeman, "that's odd!"

"What?"

"His face has been burned as if by an explosion. Even his hair is gone, though not his beard. Why, his face is unrecognizable in the condition it is in."

"True."

"He has been in a fire. A laboring man, I take it. He looks rough and rugged—"

Rand bent and touched the dead man's hands.

"Soft and smooth," he remarked.

"Rough he is, but he has not done hard labor in a long time. I think that—"

The detective stopped short. He started back as if he had received a blow.

"Hallo! what's the matter?" the policeman asked. "Do you—"

Then he, too, stopped. He had chanced to look at Rand's face, and its expression of surprise and astonishment, mingled with bewilderment, checked the bluecoat. A moment's pause, and then Rand turned and seized his companion by the arm.

"The mystery deepens!" he cried, excitedly. "This man did not die by ordinary means. The trail goes back to Doomsday Den!"

CHAPTER II.

A NEW COMER SHOWS DEEP INTEREST.

Nathaniel Rand was young in years and experience. He had shown his feelings as an older detective would not have done, and he had expressed his views in the same headlong, impulsive fashion.

Patrolman James Conroy looked at him with wonder.

"What's that?" he repeated. "The trail goes to Doomsday Den?"

"Yes."

"The Doomsday Den of this block?"

"Yes."

"Why the dickens do you think that?"

"Do you see the clothes this man has on?"

"Certainly."

"What are they?"

"It is a coarse suit, the color being a sort of brown."

"An unusual brown, eh? Butternut would about express it. This dead man is Lucas Hammond, a diamond smuggler!"

"Do you really know him?"

"I know his clothes!" tersely replied Nathaniel.

He looked seriously toward the house referred to; his brows knit thoughtfully. He was wondering how to account for certain things. The patrolman, bewildered in turn, watched his companion until Nathaniel, making sure the citizens would not hear him, pursued his investigation.

"What do you know of Doomsday Den?"

"It is the oldest, largest house for many blocks around. It was given the name of Doomsday House, or Den, because, as years passed by and it stood long after all its neighbors had been pulled down, there was a remark made that it might last until doomsday. The name was deemed appropriate; it became Doomsday House."

"But the people who live there?"

"The owner is Professor Jonathan Case."

"What sort of a man is he?"

Rand listened eagerly for the reply. When he was directed to go to Professor Case's and arrest Lucas Hammond the remark had been made that Case was not suspected of anything wrong. Now, Nathaniel wanted to know more about him.

"Case is a partial hermit," the patrolman answered. "He lives there in a plain way, having few or no visitors, and buried in his scientific studies."

"Does he live alone?"

"Alone! I should say not. Why, there is a remarkable man in that house. Ever hear of Gabriel Redaxe?"

"Gabriel Redaxe? The name is as familiar as it is strange. Surely I have heard it at some time. It is almost as familiar as my own name, yet—I have it! There was once a noted detective of the name."

Patrolman Conroy pointed to Doomsday House.

"He lives there."

"Indeed! I didn't know he was alive."

"He breathes, thinks, exists, yet he is dead."

"Explain!"

"Gabriel Redaxe retired from detective work because he was stricken with total blindness. After that he somehow lost all the money he had, and, old, almost friendless and helpless, he came here to live with Professor Case, a distant relative."

"He was a great detective."

"For thirty years, I have heard it said, he was on the force, and he was accounted a marvel. Now, he must be nearly eighty years old, but they say he is strong of body and tremendously keen of mind, but—he is helpless as a child."

"He is lucky to have a rich relative."

"I don't believe Professor Case is rich. He goes looking very seedy, and I've heard it said he barely manages to pay his bills. He has talent, but all has been swamped up in his scientific pursuits that have brought no return in cash."

"Well, Gabriel Redaxe has a roof over his head."

"Not much more, I guess. He never sees any of his old friends now, and report says he is almost in rags."

"A sad end to such a career as his. Totally blind, did you say?"

"Yes."

"But as keen of mind as ever?"

"A wonder still. Keen, sharp to see a point and seize it, cunning as the fox, strong of will and relentless—that was what he once was. They say he keeps just those qualities now."

"Luckless veteran!" murmured Nathaniel.

"Do you wish to see him?"

The detective started. He had utterly forgotten his own work in listening to the account of Gabriel Redaxe.

"Time will tell," he responded. "Why do not men come to relieve us? The roundsman has had ample time to send somebody around. I do not care to linger here."

Nathaniel's voice dropped to a subdued, thoughtful tone. He was wondering as to his proper course. He had been ordered to arrest Lucas Hammond at daybreak, but he believed that Hammond lay dead at his feet. If this was true, what was required of him?

Hammond was accused of being a diamond smuggler, and it had been expected that gems would be found upon his person. What had become of them? The prisoner had not been searched in his sight. Were any left on Hammond's person?

He searched; he found nothing.

The dead man was decently but plainly clad in the butternut-colored suit. He looked like a humble man from some remote quarter—just what Lucas Hammond was said to be.

This man before them had been rugged of form. His shoulders were broad, his chest deep and his limbs long and muscular. What his face had been could not be told, so much was it burned, but it was wide and probably coarse.

His hair was wholly gone, but a thick, short red beard remained. Whatever had burned him had spared him that much.

Nathaniel wondered greatly as to his end. Plainly, it was the ugly blow on the back of his head that had done it. But why? Had the man taken off to the station slain him for the diamonds?

Again the detective touched the hands of the lifeless man.

He had been dead for some hours.

"If the unknown man killed him, why was he lingering here so long afterward?" mused the detective. "It would be the part of a guilty man to get out of sight as soon as possible."

It was real logic, and Nathaniel wavered. He would have decided the unknown to be innocent, but there were the striking facts that he had been lurking in the doorway; that he held a diamond in his hand; that he had continued a plain attempt to avoid discovery, and that, when it came, he had refused all information regarding himself.

All this was suspicious.

The street-lamps seemed to grow dim and sickly. Day was dawning. Nathaniel heard footsteps and turned his head. A young woman was coming up the block, her movements quick, and, perhaps, nervous. The men watched her with idle curiosity, not imagining that she could have any connection with the case that interested them.

She was delicate and pretty, but her dress was plain. She looked to be a typical resident of the humble region where they stood.

Her own eyes were busy. She saw the group; she dimly saw the form outstretched by the door. The men did not move; they thought it well to prevent her from seeing what was there.

When near them she hesitated, looked more intently, and then paused. Her gaze sought to pass beyond them. She seemed to waver; then she looked up, studied the faces about her and finally fixed upon Nathaniel and spoke.

"What is it?"

"Nothing," the detective answered.

"There is a fallen man."

"True, but I wouldn't mind it, if I were you."

"Is he ill, or—worse?" she asked, abruptly.

"Pardon me, but have you interest in him?" kindly asked Rand. "Unless you have, perhaps you had better move on."

"He is dead!" she exclaimed, excitedly. "Let me see!"

She pushed past Nathaniel and had full view of the lifeless man. He lay there grim and still in the mingled, sickly light of street-lamps and day. She had unobstructed view.

The detective watched her closely. Such a woman, he mentally argued, would not insist upon sight of the unknown fallen man unless she had reason to believe she knew of him. Now, Nathaniel studied her face to see how she would be impressed.

There was a start—a swift change went over her face. He saw it all; he drew his conclusions.

"I see that you know him, miss," he remarked.

She struggled for composure. She had grown pale, and the effort to be calm was not easily carried out. Much quicker than was to be expected she looked up into the detective's face.

"He is a stranger to me," she declared, quietly.

"You were agitated by sight of him."

"He is a dead man."

"You were anxious to see him. That would not have been had you not felt a deeper interest than idle curiosity. You believed you might know him; you have found that you do know him," positively responded Nathaniel.

"Wrong, sir; I don't know the man," she asserted, firmly. "How—how did he come to his end?"

"Murdered!"

The girl started back. She had not the composure to meet this revelation calmly; she was like one dealt a severe blow.

"Impossible!" she breathed, presently.

"Why impossible, miss?"

"I mean—I said it was possible. You misunderstood me. Murdered? And is there hope that the identity of his slayer will be known?"

It swept over the young officer that she had a theory. He came to the point immediately.

"The slayer is under arrest already."

"Who was he?"

"He refused to give his name."

"Was he an old man?"

"Quite the reverse; not over thirty."

She swept a glance up toward the heavens—or the wall of the house. It was as she sought something especial there.

"A young man! Probably a rough."

"Not so, miss. He was quiet and refined, and fairly well dressed. He had the air of a well-to-do man of the lower-middle class, as I may express it. He was tall and slender, with curling hair, a mustache and small side-whiskers."

The girl reached out and grasped the fence by her side. She seemed weak and limp, and there was an expression of positive horror on her face. Nathaniel saw that, in some way, he had dealt her a terrible blow. His conscience smote him, and he was about to try and soften the stroke when she reeled and fell fainting into his arms.

CHAPTER III.

THE MASTER OF DOOMSDAY DEN.

The detective was dismayed. He was not accustomed to fainting women, and his manner was one of utter helplessness as he upheld the unknown girl, but the patrolman was more experienced. He gave prompt though rough aid, and assured Nathaniel he would soon bring her around.

"But say," he added, "ain't this suspicious?"

"What?" asked Nathaniel.

"She seemed strong enough at first, but swooned when you described the man arrested for killing this dead man."

"True. What do you think of it?"
 "Think? Why, she must know the fellow."

"Just my idea."

"No doubt of it."

"Conroy, you will soon be off duty. Will you do me a favor?"

"Name it."

"Follow where this girl goes. Do it secretly, taking great care not to be discovered by her. Be as much invisible as possible. Dog her to her home, however. I want to learn quietly where she lives, and who she is."

"I'll do all you ask. Still, she may tell all when she comes to again."

"Don't think it. She will not."

"Ha! she is coming around."

Conroy redoubled his efforts, and she soon opened her eyes. Nathaniel was kind-hearted, and he spoke to reassure her, but she was apparently deaf to his words. First of all she took a quick glance at the body, and then she lay shivering and moaning. They could not pacify her, but, when she had taken her own time, she regained her nerve.

She suddenly struggled to rise, freed herself from their grasp and stood erect. Her strength seemed to have returned, but she studiously avoided looking at the man in the butternut suit and seemed desirous of getting away.

"I am not well, and I fainted from weakness," was her explanation.

"Pardon me," replied Nathaniel, "but do you know this man?"

He pointed to the body. She did not look, but her answer was prompt and firm.

"I do not."

"And the man who is arrested for slaying him?"

She shivered; then she faced Nathaniel firmly.

"Of course I know nothing of him, either. I have been too curious about this, and have suffered the consequences. I know nothing about any part of the affair."

She made a motion to go. The detective and Conroy exchanged glances. The roundsman was approaching with other men, and there would be opportunity for Conroy to follow her as agreed upon.

The other men came up. First of all Nathaniel spoke to the roundsman, and a few whispered words secured permission for Conroy to go. The girl was receding. He moved after her with an air of unconcern.

Nathaniel was as anxious to get away upon his own work. After all, the butternut suit might be delusive, and he could not neglect the duty to which he had been assigned. He would reach Doomsday Den at just about the hour he had been directed to go there. A few more words and he formally turned the conduct of affairs there over to the roundsman; then he moved forward on his regular mission.

The house where he was to call was quite as old-looking and weather-beaten as he had been led to expect. It was not dilapidated, but great age was upon it, and nothing had been done to brighten it up. In style it was square, with rooms on both sides of the entrance—the only truly comfortable and convenient form of house known.

In this house many generations had plainly lived and died, and, for a moment Nathaniel almost expected to see some resident of antiquity spring into sight.

The place showed no sign of life, but he walked through the yard and plied the knocker.

"It is doubtful if any servant is astir," he thought.

He waited; he knocked a second time. Presently there was the sound of footsteps within, and then bolts were moved and the door opened. Before Nathaniel stood a man old enough to have very gray hair. He was tall, slender, thin, and bent, but wiry strength showed in spite of all this. He was dressed with seedy respectability, as it were, and the detective at once came to a conclusion.

"Is Professor Case in?" he inquired.

"I am Professor Case, sir," was the quiet reply.

"I have business with you, sir."

"In regard to scientific matters?"

There was a lighting up of the leathery face, but the light faded when Nathaniel non-committally replied:

"Pardon me, but I think we had better defer explanations until we are assured of more privacy."

The professor did not seem pleased, but, after a study of his companion's face, he ungraciously announced:

"You can come in."

He stepped back, and Nathaniel entered. He was led to a room just off of the wide hall. Here all was as outside—old and faded, but not in positive decay.

Prof. Case remained standing, and waited for his guest to speak. As the detective did not care whether he was asked to sit down or not he did not mind the discourtesy. He came to the point as directly as the professor could wish.

"I came," he explained, "to see Lucas Hammond."

Case remained placid and unconcerned, outwardly.

"There is no such person here," he returned.

"Where has he gone?"

"Who?"

"The question seems superfluous. We were speaking of Lucas Hammond, were we not?"

"Exactly, sir. Are you a scientist?"

"No. My business is to see Hammond. Can you tell me where he is to be found?"

"I don't know."

"He was here at 9 o'clock last evening."

The professor's manner had remained wholly unconcerned. He did not exhibit anxiety or worry at having sheltered a man wanted by the law. Perhaps he did know he had done anything of the sort. He was the personification of composure.

"You are right as to that," he admitted, calmly. "The man did visit me as you say."

"May I ask why?"

"He had been abroad, he said. Certainly, he called my attention to an alleged plant of the Amazon region, of which I never had heard. He claimed remarkable qualities for it, and wanted to make me his financial backer—I am a scientist—in bringing large quantities to New York for treatment and sale. I had to decline, for I am not rich"—a sigh from the speaker—"so Hammond went his way."

"When did he go?"

"About at the fall of night, as I remember it, last evening. I paid but little time to the hour."

"Did he have no business except to talk of the strange plant?"

"None."

"Yet, he was here for several days, or part of several days."

The professor did not seem affected in the least.

"True. He interested me, and I asked much about the plant. But when I had finished he was not done; he was determined to make a bargain of some sort with me. He extolled the plant, and took my time until I rather wearied of it. He finally went, and I know no more of it."

"Was he a stranger to you when he first came?"

Prof. Case had been looking bored, but he now looked Nathaniel squarely in the face. There never was anything keen about his own face, regard or manner, but, in a quiet way, he appeared to be studying his companion. His reply was not long delayed, and it was even and deliberate.

"He was a stranger to me."

"Had he relatives in New York?"

"I do not know."

"Did he seem to be well supplied with money?"

"He exhibited none, but assured me he had some means."

"Did you see him have any diamonds?"

"Diamonds?" repeated the professor, showing slight surprise.

"Yes."

"I saw none. Surely, he was not the man to have such things—a plain, wandering, rough person."

"Did he not mention them?"

"No."

Jonathan Case looked Nathaniel squarely in the face again, and his eyes were as mild and steady as could be imagined. He was like a man who, caring nothing for the subject of conversation, is yet polite to a companion for courtesy's sake.

In spite of this, the detective was fast getting to doubt him. He had been sent to arrest an alleged smuggler. The fact did not prove that the professor was knowing to his sins, and Nathaniel had been inclined to absolve such a man as Jonathan, but he was becoming doubtful now, without exactly knowing why.

Nathaniel's own gaze fell. What was he to do? If Lucas Hammond was dead the diamonds had not been found on his body by officers of law. Should all the blame be thrown upon the man under arrest, or was he innocent, and was Case guilty of something or other? Had he stolen the diamonds?

There was a pause. Nathaniel, not new to his calling, was uncertain, and Jonathan stood like a statue, evidently willing to let him take his time.

The lull was broken unexpectedly and rudely. Heavy steps sounded in the hall, and both men instinctively turned to look toward that quarter.

The door was thrown open—another man unceremoniously introduced himself to their notice.

Rough of dress and person, a gladiator of muscle and bull-dog of face, he stood before them sweeping a ferocious glance from one to the other. Anger and an unspoken threat were in his manner, and Nathaniel recognized that, for some reason, a storm was to come.

It came. The detective was given but little attention; the rough intruder fixed a sharper gaze on the professor, and his heavy voice pealed through the room.

"Say, I want somethin' of you!" he declared, belligerently.

A timid man might well have shrunk away from that giant of strength in his wrath, but Jonathan Case was as calm as ever.

"What do you want?" he inquired.

"I want justice!" cried the giant. "Where is Lucas Hammond! Where are the diamonds? I know where Hammond is—he's dead, an' you killed him! Yes, that's the plain truth. The diamonds put the devil into you—I accuse you of murderin' Hammond. I'm here fer revenge!"

CHAPTER IV.

A TURBULENT MAN'S CHARGES.

It was a striking situation. Even Nathaniel Rand, accustomed as he was to exciting scenes, felt his nerves thrill as the booming voice of the big man made such charges. A crisis had been forced upon all concerned, and the assertions of the intruder were of the highest importance.

The detective looked at Jonathan Case to see how this ugly charge was received. The professor was not wholly unmoved, but his leathery face exhibited little signs of worry and less of dismay.

"This is a remarkable interruption," he replied, manifesting a small degree of irritation. "Who are you, sir, who comes here and so misbehaves himself?"

"I'm Barlow Craig, an' I'm the partner of Lucas Hammond!" the big man tersely roared.

"Go to him, then. I don't want you here."

"Oh! you don't, eh? Well, that don't surprise me; I didn't expect you did. I come ter consult my own wishes, not your'n. I want them diamonds!"

"I know nothing about any diamonds."

"I say you do. Lucas Hammond come ter sell them ter you. He's dead, an' the sparklers is gone. Where be they?"

"How should I know?"

"You do know, an' that's all there is to it. Fork them over, or I'll use you as bad as you have Hammond. Give me the diamonds!"

Barlow Craig advanced threateningly, but the professor did not retreat. He stood his ground, not defiantly, for he was not a match for Craig, even if the latter had been handicapped by the loss of an arm; but with his usual remarkable composure.

"That will do!" he returned, petulantly. "I don't want any more of such nonsense."

Barlow stopped short and looked in bewildered surprise.

"Nonsense," he repeated.

"That's what I said."

"Mebbe you don't believe I mean it?"

"You surely seem to mean it. I, however, know nothing of what you say."

"Hasn't Hammond been here?"

"Yes."

"Didn't he have the diamonds then?"

"I saw no diamonds, and heard of none."

"That's a confounded lie!"

"If he had such things, how did he come by them? He did not look to me like a rich man."

"Ef you must know it, he smuggled them inter this country from Brazil."

"Did you help him?"

From the first Nathaniel had stood in utter silence. He was willing these two men should have their difficulty out. He might learn something by it. Now, Barlow Craig swept a quick glance toward the detective and evidently decided to be cautious.

"I didn't help him," he answered, "but I was his partner—yes, and I'm his heir. Fork over them diamonds!"

The speaker grew threatening again, but Jonathan Case calmly made answer: "I have no diamonds, and I know of none. Even if I have, you admit that they were smuggled. Beware, my friend, lest you get into trouble with the law."

Nathaniel grew to know the professor better. The man was cunning. He had lured Barlow Craig on, and was now ready to deal with him.

"If you are not a smuggler," pursued the master of the house, "you are, by your own confession, the ally of one, and knowing to his guilt. You say he came here to sell smuggled diamonds, and that you are his partner. Look out for the law, my friend!"

Again the uninvited caller grew bewildered; then he turned to Nathaniel. He studied his man closely; he addressed him.

"Say, may I ask who you be, sir?"

Nathaniel broke his long silence.

"I, too, am interested in Lucas Hammond. You say he is dead. Can you prove it?"

"The police have his body over yonder."

"I thought as much, and I am here to ask about him."

Craig fell back suddenly.

"Then you are a detective!" he flashed.

"Since you guess it, I am!"

"Thunder and blazes!" exclaimed the smuggler's ally.

"What is the matter?"

Barlow Craig did not answer. Perhaps he thought an answer superfluous. He stood scratching his shaggy head in an uneasy way, his expression deeply meditative, as if he were wondering what sort of trouble he had run his head into.

"You are just the man I want to see," pursued Nathaniel. "I wish to know more about Lucas Hammond. What can you tell? Who was he? What about these smuggled diamonds? Where can I learn all about the man referred to by us?"

"Boss," answered Barlow Craig, bracing up with a jerk, "it's mighty little I

kin tell. I never saw Hammond until a few days ago. I met him in a joint, an' we got sociable. He asked me did I know a man who could dispose o' some diamonds fer him."

"And you sent him here?"

"No. Diamonds ain't never been exactly in my line"—Mr. Craig looked down at his humble apparel—"an' I had ter pass. Then he said he knew o' one man, hisself, an' that was Professor Case; an' that, while he wasn't just the duck he wanted, he would come here."

"Rubbish!" commented the professor, coolly.

"With the smuggled diamonds?" continued the detective.

"I don't know they was smuggled," replied Craig, with an air of great candor, "but I suspected it. Says I ter myself, 'How could this feller have sparklers unless he worked them in free o' duty?' That's w'ot made me think they was smuggled."

Nathaniel had his doubts of the sincerity of this statement, but he did not mention it.

"And so Hammond did come here?"

"Yes."

Prof. Case had been listening patiently.

"He surely came," he now admitted, "but not to say anything of diamonds. He must have hoaxed you, sir."

"Not much!" cried Barlow Craig. "He had them, I say!"

"My friend, you have asserted utter ignorance of the diamonds, as far as association in crime with him is concerned, yet, before you knew there was a detective here, you declared yourself Hammond's partner. How do you explain that?"

Craig wiped his forehead nervously.

"I was bluffin' on the diamond part; I wasn't his partner. I only said that ter get square usage."

"Very unlikely."

"See here!" exclaimed Barlow, firing up. "I want you ter meet the main issue. Somebody has murdered Hammond. Who? I say you did it, ter steal the diamonds!"

"Even the detective will tell you that is absurd. Am I not right, sir?"

"I do not know what became of the alleged diamonds," evasively replied Nathaniel. "I wish to learn. They were not on the body when it was found. Where did they go to?"

"Of that I know nothing."

"You say you saw none?"

"I did not see any."

"Who else in your house met Hammond?"

"My colored servant, Patrick Henry High, and my relative, Gabriel Redaxe. Nobody else."

Nathaniel's thoughts were abruptly recalled to Gabriel Redaxe. In his devotion to duty he had for the time forgotten that the retired and crippled veteran was in the house. With return of the knowledge came a desire to see the man who had once been a veritable bloodhound of law in New York.

"Kindly call Mr. Redaxe," he requested.

"You will have to go to his room. He rarely leaves it, and certainly would not come to you."

"That is as he wishes."

"You can go. Our other caller"—the professor looked at Barlow Craig—"can hardly wish to go, and my relative is so afflicted in point of health that he would not wish to see more than one person."

Opposition was to be expected from Craig, but he surprised Nathaniel by acquiescing readily.

"I'll wait here fer you," he added.

"I will go first and prepare the way so Gabriel will not use you rudely," pursued Case. "He is not always amiable."

Nathaniel would have preferred to do all the talking with Gabriel Redaxe, and explain the business himself, but he was awed by the reputation of the veteran.

Young in years and experience, he dared not go contrary to what the renowned ex-detective might wish.

The professor went, leaving the two

callers alone. Nathaniel renewed his efforts to learn something, but Barlow stuck to his story and revealed no more.

Ten minutes later Case returned.

"Mr. Redaxe will see you," he announced. "You can go to him."

CHAPTER V.

A REMARKABLE VETERAN.

Nathaniel Rand started. To him it seemed no small thing to face the man who had been the wonder of New York a few years before. His modesty made itself felt, but he did not want to miss the chance.

"The room is on the next floor, at the rear," added Professor Case.

Nathaniel went out of the parlor. He ascended the bent and creaking stairs, and easily found his way after. He saw an open door, and, when he reached it, he saw a man inside.

One glance told him it was the person he sought, but, even with his knowledge of the ex-detective's reputation, he was not prepared for what he saw.

Seated in an old, plain arm-chair, was a man of most impressive appearance. He was of unusual size in all ways—tall, broad of shoulders, long of limb, and of remarkable muscular development. His weight exceeded two hundred pounds, and it was all bone, sinew and muscle, so to speak; there was no superfluous flesh about him.

He was very old—at least eighty, one would surmise. His abundant hair was snowy white, and, standing stiffly upright, made a beautiful covering. His face was shaven clean—and such a face! It was of full color, broad in every part, and full of tremendous power, resolution and stubborn will.

It would have been a model face for a warrior, but it had its drawback—the eyes were plainly sightless. The eyes were wide open now, but they saw nothing.

He faced the door, and just then he reminded Nathaniel of a lion located in his lair with dignity.

The younger man had stepped lightly, and there seemed to be nothing to tell of his coming, but the pause was suddenly broken by an imperious call from the man in the arm-chair.

"Well, who are you?" he demanded.

Nathaniel summoned his courage and crossed the threshold.

"I beg your pardon, sir, if I intrude upon you—"

"I asked you who you were," severely returned the old man.

"My name, sir, is Nathaniel Rand—"

"The detective, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Sit down!"

It was not a polite invitation; it was a rough, imperious command, and Nathaniel remained standing.

"I suppose this is Mr. Redaxe?" he then ventured.

"I am Gabriel Redaxe."

"Your reputation is well known to me, sir—"

"Is that what you are here to talk about?" harshly demanded the old detective.

"Well, no, sir. I wanted to speak to you of Lucas Hammond—"

"Do it, then!"

Nathaniel did not find his composure returning. He was young; the veteran was aged. He held him in awe. He envied him his one-time skill; he would have been glad to sit at his feet and learn of him. Now, his modesty was rebuffed, and he was not being used with courtesy. Gabriel Redaxe was not so rude as his words seemed, but he was commanding and imperious. He was like an overbearing military leader more than anything else.

The young detective tried to rally. He spoke again.

"I presume Professor Case has told you something of my errand—"

"All!"

"May I ask what you think of it?"

"Young man, do you mean to say you charge the professor—an honored man

and a bright light in science—with stealing diamonds? Insolence! Why, he is my relative, sir—a distant cousin! He steal diamonds? Absurd!”

“I have not so charged him, Mr. Redaxe.”

“It amounts to that.”

“Pardon me, sir. I only wish to learn what has become of the diamonds. I came here to investigate because Lucas Hammond was here.”

“In rags and patches. Diamonds? Huff, huff!”

Gabriel Redaxe expelled his breath in a peculiar manner. Practically, it was a grunt of disgust, but Nathaniel lived to hear that exhalation often, and to know it could express many things.

“The information of the police is absolute that Hammond did smuggle the diamonds, sir. Hammond is now dead; the diamonds are gone. Where?”

“Do you think they are here? Eh, eh?”

“I can hazard no guess as to where they are. I do not know.”

“So Hammond is really dead, is he?”

“A man has been found dead that we think is he, sir.”

“Murdered?”

“He was killed by a blow received on the back of his head. The patrolman on the beat proclaims it to be murder. I do not assert that, for it may have been an accident. I think it was murder.”

“Anything peculiar about it?”

“About the wound?”

“About the case, young man—about the case!” impatiently exclaimed the white-haired veteran.

Gabriel Redaxe was no longer imperious. His face of tremendous power had grown deeply thoughtful, and he was plainly looking into the detective side of the tragedy. His deep, impressive voice could not be less than impressive, but he was not commanding then.

“There were some things peculiar,” admitted Nathaniel. “He was found lying partly in a vestibule, and partly outside of it. I do not think the deed was done there—”

“Why not?”

“There was no sign of a struggle, and none of blood. He must have bled from the wound, so he must have been slain elsewhere.”

“Anything more?”

“Fire played a part, seemingly mysterious, in the case. His face and hair were burned, though not his beard.”

“Huff, huff!” muttered Gabriel Redaxe.

It was non-committal enough, but Nathaniel felt that the veteran had a theory. He tried to avail himself of it.

“May I ask, sir, what you infer from this?”

“I am not a detective.”

“You were once.”

“Who told you so?”

“I might almost say, every man in New York. As a boy I heard of you often. Since my own brief term on the police force I have heard you mentioned frequently.”

“Somebody has taken my place. Men are but creatures of short existence here below.”

“Your fame, sir, endures—”

“Huff, huff!”

This time the strange grunt was impatient, and Nathaniel stopped short. There was a pause. Gabriel Redaxe beat his foot thoughtfully on the floor, while his caller eyed him with unflinching interest.

The veteran was a noble specimen of physical manhood, except for his sightless eyes, but it was the tremendous power of his face that held the observer's attention most closely.

The face was broad at all parts, especially in the jaw, which told of unflinching determination, and Nathaniel was more awed than ever.

No wonder Redaxe had been a master of his calling.

Presently the veteran gave two thumps on the floor with the long staff he held in his hand, and raised his head.

“A dead man—maybe murdered,” he spoke. “Young man, is this your case?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Are you equal to it?”

“I shall do my best, Mr. Redaxe.”

“You are young.”

“Professor Case has told you that much, I see.”

“He did not hint at your age.”

“Then how can you tell?”

“Your voice, sir.”

“I marvel at your skill, but you are right.”

“You are well and strong; you should win.”

“How do you know I am well and strong?”

“You have been standing firm and motionless. A weak man would have shifted his position often, to rest himself.”

The veteran thumped the floor twice more with his staff, and added:

“Come here!”

Nathaniel went. The blind man proceeded to run his hands over the younger's man's face and head, much as a phrenologist would have done. He probably found something in every bump and line, for, while Nathaniel stood in embarrassment, he examined all. He stopped abruptly when his curiosity was satisfied.

“That's enough!”

“Pardon me, sir, but will you now speak further of Lucas Hammond?”

“I know nothing. I refer you to Professor Jonathan Case—my cousin, sir. This Hammond person may be dead or alive, but you can rely upon it that the professor is certain of his position. Have you charged him with crime, sir?—my cousin!—I say, have you had the temerity to assert such a thing?”

“I have charged him with nothing.”

“His standing is assured; he is sure of his position! A cousin of mine! A professor, too, and wise in his calling. A scientist—his standing is assured!”

“I am glad you recommend him so highly.”

“Go forth to your case, young man. If you feel like it, come and see me again. Act your own pleasure. Remember, however, that if some things are uncertain, others are assured.”

It occurred to Nathaniel that, for a man of such strong will, the veteran was not always so explicit as he might have been, but he did not venture to say so.

“I think I shall see you again, sir,” he replied. “A suggestion from Gabriel Redaxe would be much to a young detective.”

“The oldest dogs do not always bay the loudest.”

“The older dog may be the wiser.”

“Yet his teeth may be gone.”

Down came the staff with two quick thumps on the floor.

“Go!” Redaxe directed. “Duty calls you!”

“I am pleased to have met such a noted detective—”

“Huff, huff! Good-day, sir!”

There was no more for Nathaniel to say, or, at least, he did not think of more. He backed out of the room as politely as if Gabriel Redaxe had possessed the best of eyes and took his way down-stairs.

He went like one in a dream. It was a good deal for a young detective to have seen the famous master of the art.

Professor Case and Barlow Craig awaited him. Mr. Case looked at Nathaniel with no show of interest, and it was Craig who asked:

“What luck?”

“I have learned nothing new.”

“There is nothing to learn here,” added the professor.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PRISONER.

The detective bowed graciously, mutely setting the seal of his approval on what the professor said.

“More than that,” he responded, “it

is useless for me to linger here. Since you have no knowledge of the case I shall have to hunt elsewhere.”

“I'll go along,” added Barlow Craig. “I want to see my old friend who has been so sorely used. Maybe some tramp killed Lucas Hammond.”

“Quite likely,” coincided Mr. Case. “Anyhow, Hammond left here soon after dark last evening. I know no more. I will go to my laboratory now.”

Craig moved toward the door, and Nathaniel followed. His last remark had been diplomatic. He could not say that the professor was so ignorant of all that had happened, but it was just as well to proceed lightly with him for a time.

A formal leave was taken, and then the door closed behind the two visitors. They walked down the street together. For the time Nathaniel's mind was again on Gabriel Redaxe.

“A man of wonderful ability. Still, I am not sure I understand him fully. Much that he said was non-committal. I can't help feeling that he was playing with me in some degree. I have not his keenness, but I believe there was more in his mind than I learned of then. What was it?”

Nathaniel was deep in this riddle when Barlow Craig, sending a swift glance back, suddenly seized his companion's arm.

“Say!” he exclaimed, “wot do ye think of that song-an'-dance?”

“What do you mean?”

“Why, Johnny Case's. I thought I would t'row fits!”

“Explain.”

“Johnny is as crooked an' cunnin' as a corkscrew—jest about. He tried ter be sly, but he wasn't built right.”

“What do you suspect?”

“Say, boss, you kin bet yer uppers he wasn't givin' us the true facts. Lucas Hammond was killed in his ranch, an' he knows it. Of course the old man wiped him out fer his diamonds.”

“Mr. Craig, were you Hammond's friend?”

“Sure!”

“Then be frank with me. What more do you know of this affair?”

“Not a thing,” declared Craig, with a virtuous look.

Nathaniel did not believe him, so he devoted considerable more time to argument with him. It amounted to nothing. Barlow stuck to his story, and there was no proof that he knew more than he told.

At first Nathaniel had been reluctant to part with a man who had known Lucas Hammond, but further talk with Craig convinced the detective that the man would not try to avoid being found when wanted.

Barlow gave his address, and asserted that it was permanent. After this, and in view of the fact that, though rough, he did not look vicious, Nathaniel allowed him to go his way.

Left alone, the detective determined to act with celerity. There was something mysterious about the way the body in the butternut-colored suit had come where it was found, and, though it had reached its resting place during the hours of darkness, he thought some of the residents of the block might well be questioned about it.

He took his way to the house where it had been discovered, and rung the bell. The call was promptly answered by a woman in plain but neat apparel, and Nathaniel began abruptly:

“Do you live here, madam?”

“I do thot same, sir.”

“Have you heard about the body that was found at the door?”

“Sure, the whole house is talkin' ave it, sir.”

“What do they say?”

“They are full ave wonder to their chins.”

“Which one of you saw the body brought here?”

“Which wan saw—Sure, I didn't know anybody did.”

“Has nobody mentioned seeing it?”

“No. We've all talked it over, an' we can't understand it at all. Yes, an' all

said they didn't see nor hear a blessed thing."

"You have heard all say that?"

"Yes. That is, all but Mr. Basil Bowen. He hasn't come in yet."

"Hasn't come in? Since when?"

"Well, he didn't sleep at home last night."

"Stayed out all night?" questioned Nathaniel, suddenly getting a new idea.

"Oh, I don't mean that; of course he stopped with some friend."

"Ah! Possibly I have met this Mr. Basil Bowen. Will you describe him?"

The woman said she was not skilled in that line, but she made the attempt and succeeded quite as well as was expected.

"He's tall and slender, with kinder curly hair, an' a mustache an' little side-whiskers."

"It may be the same. Well, about this man who was arrested. Who of the inmates of this house has seen him?"

"Nobody."

"Not at the time of the arrest?"

"Not wan ave of us was awake, I reckon."

"Have you seen anybody loitering around this block lately?"

"No; I don't remember of it."

"Still, it may be so, and somebody who seemed innocent enough at the time may be the man arrested. Who is there here who can go to Police Headquarters with me and take a look at the prisoner?"

"There's nobody kin do as well as me boy Tim. He's on the street a good bit, an' sees more than anybody else, sure."

"Where is he?"

"I'll call him."

Tim was called accordingly. He proved to be a sharp-looking boy of some thirteen years, and he readily agreed to go with Nathaniel. Really, he was delighted to think how he would have a chance to boast of it to the other boys of the block.

The detective took him to Headquarters.

First of all he made inquiries as to how the prisoner was conducting himself, and was told that he had relapsed into utter silence. He had all along refused to tell his name, or anything about himself, and just then, he was not even refusing.

He would not answer the simplest questions any longer.

Everything was favorable for the plan Nathaniel had in mind, and he informed Tim that a secret view would be given him, so that the prisoner might not know he was under espionage.

Accordingly, Tim was taken close to the door and told to look in. While he prepared to do so, Nathaniel watched, not the prisoner, but the boy. He had his reward.

Tim had been full of swaggering importance, but now his mood suddenly changed. He looked; his eyes opened wide, his face was a picture of surprise and bewilderment.

The detective allowed him all the time he wished, and presently he turned about with the same look on his face. He transferred his gaze to Nathaniel.

"Is that the man you wanted me ter look at?"

"Well, I haven't looked in myself. What man did you see?"

"Why, that's Basil Bowen!"

"Oh! Of your house?"

"Yes."

Nathaniel stepped forward. The man thus identified was the prisoner who would not give his name.

The detective was more exultant than surprised. All the while he had seen that the prisoner might be an inmate of the house where the body was found, and when he heard that one of the inmates had not come in the previous night and was still missing, he had resorted to this way of settling his suspicion.

One step in the case was taken. Basil Bowen might be guilty or innocent, but he was known.

Nathaniel took Tim back where he could talk with the boy.

"What do you know of young Bowen?" he asked.

"Why, he lives in our house."

"With whom?"

"He jest has a room, an' takes his meals with John Smith's family."

"What is his business?"

"He's bookkeeper fer Stubbs, the junk-dealer, an' has an interest inter the business."

Nathaniel was silent, whereupon Tim suddenly resumed:

"Say, boss, why did you show me him, instead o' the feller that killed the other man? Yes, an' why is Basil here, too? You don't mean ter say he's arrested, do ye? Why, he's the likeliest young man in our ward—honest as the day, an' mighty enterprisin', the old folks say. He's bound ter get rich."

The detective was saved from replying by the appearance of Patrolman Conroy. The latter stood a little distance off, and was beckoning with considerable show of energy, so Nathaniel excused himself and went to the officer.

"Say," Conroy exclaimed, "I've done as you told me, and I've struck oil. That young woman lives on Rivington Street, and I've got her name. What do you think it is?"

"What is it?"

"Yettol Hammond! Yes, siree, her surname is the same as the dead man's. How is that for a starter?"

CHAPTER VII.

THE STORY OF A QUARREL.

Nathaniel looked straight into the patrolman's face. He made no motion of surprise, and his expression told nothing. A moment he was silent, and then he replied:

"Yettol Hammond, eh?"

"Yes, and you know that the dead man was Lucas Hammond," answered Conroy, triumphantly. "If that does not point to meat, what would?"

"Have you done more?"

"No."

"Have you not seen or questioned her?"

"No. I left that for you. I just simply learned who she was, using much care to hide my investigation. My course leaves you free to proceed as you wish, without the impediment of a story of my work having come to her ears."

"You have done well, Conroy. I thank you for your help and discretion, and I will look into it further, at once."

Conroy went about his business, and then Nathaniel was promptly tackled by Tim. The boy had been doing some thinking, and his expression was excited.

"Say!" he exclaimed, "w'ot does this mean? Is Basil Bowen arrested? He must be, or he wouldn't be there. Say, w'ot has he done? He can't have done nothin'—he's a fine feller, he is. Ask anybody who knows him."

It was plain that the detective was not going to find a sympathizer in Tim, so he proceeded to get rid of him as quickly and quietly as possible, and the boy was not reluctant. He was all eagerness to get back home and tell people the news that Basil Bowen was under arrest. It was bad for Basil, but Tim thought he could pose as a hero for a time, if he brought the news to those who knew him.

Nathaniel Rand let no time go to waste. He immediately wended his way toward the house where Conroy said Yettol Hammond was to be found.

It proved to be an old and rusty building, and it was plain it was the home of poverty. Inquiry at the front door proved that Miss Hammond had a room there; that she was a dressmaker, and had no relations as far as her outside neighbors knew.

The detective moved up the stairs to see her. He remembered how she looked when she had been before him previously, and he was not in love with his task, but he had to go on.

He knocked at her door, but there was no reply. He knocked again, and then another door opened, and he saw a middle-aged woman.

"Is it Yettol you want?" she asked.

"Yes."

"She went out half an hour ago."

"When will she return?"

"I don't know."

"I would like to see her."

"Are you a friend?"

"I certainly am not an enemy."

"I think she is having things to trouble her, just now."

"That is bad."

"It's all along of a father of hers who has shown up lately—more's the pity. She was happy enough until he came."

"If she had a father, why hasn't he been with her all the time?"

"Because he wasn't any good. He has just been wandering all over, and left her to shift for herself, and make her own living. A few days ago he got back to New York, and what does he do but come around here and make himself disagreeable."

"Surely, he didn't want her to support him?"

"No; but he was lordly and dictatorial. Do you know Basil Bowen?"

"I do not think I am acquainted with him."

"He is Yettol's young man, and he's a nice fellow; but what does old Hammond do but take a dislike to him, and order him out of the house. Don't mention it—none of the other people in the house know it but me."

"Did Bowen go?"

"Oh! me, oh! me! Worse than that. He tried to be peaceable, but Hammond set upon him, struck him three or four times, and there would have been a big fight, only my husband stepped in and stopped it."

"He assaulted Bowen, did he?"

"He did that, the scamp! Yes, and he called him all sorts of names. It was shameful."

"What did Bowen do?"

"Just simply defended himself, but never struck Hammond at all."

"Wasn't he very angry?"

"Yes, but he kept calm. He was that pale you could have made a white cloth black on his face, I do believe."

"Kept his temper, though?"

"He did that. Never a sharp word from him, but he said to the old fellow very quietly: 'You will be sorry for this later on, Mr. Hammond!'"

"What did he mean by that?"

"Why, that Hammond would be ashamed when he had thought it over."

"It wasn't a threat, then?"

The woman threw up her hands.

"Oh, bless you, no, no! Not a bit of it. Basil took it all very meekly—he's a gentleman, and he wouldn't hurt nobody."

The assertion was not disputed, and Nathaniel proceeded to bring conversation away from the point before the woman grew suspicious of his inquiries. He handled the matter skillfully, and they spoke of trivial things for some time.

The detective was reluctant to waste any time, and he finally bade his new acquaintance good-day, and was going down the stairs when he saw Yettol herself coming up.

He fell back, and allowed her to reach the floor.

She was looking wan and pale, and she did not brighten when she recognized her caller. She would have been dull not to argue ill from his appearance, and, when he said he would like to see her briefly, she seemed too agitated to reply.

She opened her door, and he followed her in.

"I will take but little of your time, Miss Hammond," he promised.

She found the power of speech in an inquiry almost fierce.

"What do you want?" she demanded.

"First of all, to ask your pardon for renewing the conversation we had early this morning—"

"I have nothing to say," she interrupted.

"Again, pardon me, but I have no choice in the matter. I am compelled to ask your attention. I have learned that

you bear the name of Hammond—the same name supposed to be that of the man found on the street, this morning.”

“What of that?”

“Simply this—you are his daughter.”

“I do not admit it. Suppose I am?”

“Miss Hammond, will you kindly tell me all you can? A daughter should feel an interest in such a matter as this.”

“Sir, I have lived alone for years, earning my own living. If I have had a father—if I have, I say—he has not paid any attention to me, or aided to support me, or shown me any act of kindness. What have I to do with such a father?” she fiercely asked.

“At least, you do not object to seeing his death avenged?”

“You are free to act for yourself.”

“Had Lucas Hammond an enemy?”

“I do not know that he had a friend.”

“You evade the point. Can I rely on you for nothing?”

Yettol looked down at the floor. She seemed to consider what to do and say, and to find decision difficult. Presently she looked up again, and her manner was more subdued.

“Lucas Hammond was my father,” she admitted. “Of him, his associates, his friends, his enemies, his movements, I know nothing. Even when I was a mere child he left me alone, and to earn my own living or starve. My understanding is that he has been wandering all over the world, but I do not know.”

“When he came back recently he came here?”

A fresh hesitation, and then the reply: “Yes.”

“Did you see him have money, or other valuables?”

“No. He seemed to be poor; he told me he was very poor. He evidently thought,” she bitterly added, “that I would ask him for financial help. He was wrong; I would starve before I would now accept his aid in any way!”

“He went to the house of Professor Jonathan Case. Do you know why?”

“No. He told me he had been there several times—he had been drinking when he said it, or he would not have been so confidential—but why he went I know not.”

“What about Basil Bowen?”

Nathaniel had reached a point where the other branch of the case was to be mentioned, and he came to the point with merciless directness. He spoke, and the shot went home. Yettol started back, and the last remnant of color faded out of her cheeks.

“You—you—What do you know of him?” she demanded, tremulously.

“He was arrested this morning, you know. You recognized him from the description given when I saw you before. What of him? Suspicion points to him. Is he innocent or guilty?”

CHAPTER VIII.

A FALSEHOOD DISCOVERED.

Yettol drew herself up with a swift motion, and her eyes flashed with sudden fire.

“Innocent!” she cried. “He is as innocent as you or I!”

“Then what was he doing near Lucas Hammond’s body?” the detective asked, quickly.

“You say he was found there; I know nothing about it. If he was found there was he not at his own door?”

“Yes, and so was Lucas Hammond,” reminded Nathaniel.

“Basil Bowen had a right there.”

“That is certainly true. Still, he was found by your father’s body, in hiding. What of the quarrel they had?”

“Quarrel? They had none!” Yettol declared, stoutly.

“I have been told that they did, and that Mr. Hammond struck Basil Bowen, and generally misused him.”

“It is not true; somebody has lied about it. There was no quarrel, and nothing to quarrel about. Basil knows nothing about Lucas Hammond.”

Nathaniel bowed with cold formality. He could not blame Yettol for defending

her lover stoutly at the expense of a father who had never been a parent in act to her. Still, he was not pleased to have his case thus deprived of a helping hand.

“Should you happen to remember more, later, than you remember now, I trust you will call on me, Miss Hammond,” he replied. “I can easily prove all I assert, and I may be of more help than damage to Basil Bowen in his prison cell, if I have due aid and information given to me now.”

For a moment Yettol wavered. She was thoroughly womanly, and all of her love, sympathy, and interest went out to Basil. She wanted to help him, to act so as to further his interests; but she soon remembered with whom she was dealing, and her indecision vanished.

“I am sorry you have such a wrong impression,” she answered. “You have been sadly misinformed. There was no quarrel, and I can assure you that Basil did not harm Lucas Hammond.”

Nathaniel bowed again.

“Miss Hammond, good-morning!”

With these words, peculiarly and coldly spoken, the detective turned and walked from the room. He hoped Yettol would call him back. She did nothing of the sort, and he went on unchecked to the street.

“Looks bad for Basil,” he mused.

“There was a quarrel, and he was struck by Hammond. He told Hammond he would be sorry for striking the blow. Then he was found by Hammond’s body. He had a diamond in his hand, yet Yettol says she knew nothing about any diamonds? Did she, or did she not know of them?”

Meditating thus, Nathaniel retraced his steps. His way was toward the quarter where the tragedy had begun, as far as his knowledge went, but he was still short of his destination when he was suddenly accosted by a messenger boy.

“Say!” exclaimed the boy, “you are the man I’m after. I was to deliver this letter to you at Police Headquarters, but I guess you don’t mind as long as you get it?”

“No.”

“Here’s the letter?”

“Who is it from?”

“I don’t know. It was left at the office; I didn’t see the sender myself.”

“All right.”

Nathaniel took the envelope, and the boy hurried off. The detective did not suspect that he was to see anything of especial importance, and his manner was careless up to the time when he saw the brief message within. Then his mood changed—he started in surprise.

“What’s this?” he exclaimed.

The note read thus:

“Detective Rand:—You are off on a dangerous trail. If you had seen the experience of many years, you would still need to be alert in your present case—more alert than ever before. Danger will confront you at every step, cunningly masked, and it will be danger of which you never heard before. Beware! Be ever on the watch, or you will be a dead man within a few days. The shadowy danger is on your track.”

There the missive ended, no signature appearing anywhere.

Nathaniel knit his brows thoughtfully. “Is this a timely warning or a hoax?” he wondered.

There was nothing to tell, and he turned the sheet over several times without learning more.

“Danger of which I never heard before—a shadowy danger!” he muttered. “This is most mysterious; I can’t see into it. What danger is there of which I never heard?”

The idea conveyed in the last words seemed so absurd that he momentarily suspected that somebody was trying to scare him off of the trail, but further study failed to develop any signs of such a motive—he was simply warned not to abate his vigilance.

He finally put the letter into his pocket and moved on.

Reaching the block where Basil Bowen lived he decided to go into that thickly populated house and interview the people there. He did so. All denied any knowledge, direct or indirect, of the tragedy, and they were stout in their defense of Basil.

Not one would admit that he might have done the deed. Nathaniel had seldom heard a man more highly spoken of by those who knew him.

The news that a detective was on the scene soon spread, and there were many curious persons who gathered. They were a nuisance to the detective, but, in the midst of it all, there came to him a man better dressed than the average of the party, and one with an air of prosperity.

“I would like a word with you in private,” he announced.

“On business?”

“Yes.”

“You can have it.”

They went aside, and the stranger began promptly.

“Rumor goes that this Lucas Hammond was a total stranger to Professor Case when he went to that house—is that right?”

“I have been told so.”

“By Case?”

“Well, rumor says so.”

“Then, rumor lies!”

“How do you know?”

“I live neighbor to Jonathan Case; I’ve lived there for years.”

“Well, sir?”

“If anybody says that Hammond was a stranger when he went there this time it is a mistake or a lie. He has been there before—yes, years before.”

“Are you sure?”

“I am.”

“Did you know Hammond?”

“Never spoke with him in my life, but I’ve seen him there. At times, off and on, he has been there for a good ten years. Of late he has not been around until this trip. He never was there often, or, rather, there would be long stretches when he did not come at all, after which he would call several times within a few days—then he would disappear again and be unseen for months or years, perhaps.”

“How do you know this?”

“Because I lived next door, and could not help it. I am not a meddler, and I interfere with nobody’s business but my own, but one cannot help seeing a little as he goes along.”

“Hammond, then, was an occasional visitor, according to your version. What could be his business there?”

“Why, he was a relative, you know.”

“A relative of whom?”

“Professor Case.”

Nathaniel Rand was moving on, but he took the news with outward composure, and his companion had nothing to show that he had made an important revelation.

“How do you know that?” quietly proceeded the detective.

“I had it from the professor’s own lips years ago. He said that Hammond was related to him, but that he was not proud of the fact. He was a wandering, roving fellow, and Case wanted nothing to do with him. He had but little, for Hammond rarely came around.”

“An unwelcome guest, eh?”

“A caller would fit it better; he never remained except on the last occasion. He had reason for it this time, maybe.”

“Why do you think so?”

“I saw him when he came, a few days ago. The professor happened to be on the stoop when he arrived. He was not warmly greeted.”

“Was the greeting hostile?”

“No; simply cold. Case did not want to see him, and he showed it in a quiet way, but Hammond soon warmed him out. He said he was in America for the first time in many years, but that he had not come empty-handed. He declared to Case that he had struck a good thing, and wanted to let Case into it—such were his words.”

"A good thing, eh? What?"

"Case asked him. Hammond looked around warily, it seemed, and then told him he would explain inside, not there."

"Did they go in?"

"Yes, and Hammond was around more or less for some days. Looked as if he convinced the professor that he had a good thing, for he was allowed to stay. That was new. I wonder what it meant?"

CHAPTER IX. A BLOW FALLS.

The news-bearer had grown suddenly inquisitive, as if he would like to get points, as well as give them, but Nathaniel did not humor his desire. He made no direct reply to the question, but continued to talk with his informant for some time longer.

When all had been learned the citizen went his way.

The detective had moved on a step. The man had been so plainly sincere and actuated by a desire only to do what duty called for, that he must be believed.

By his testimony Jonathan Case was caught in a falsehood. The latter had declared that Hammond had been a stranger to him when he came a few days before. Now, it was proven that the man had been an old acquaintance, and, by Case's own statement, a relative.

"The police have Basil Bowen," mused Nathaniel. "They can keep him, but I shall not forget Jonathan Case."

The remainder of the day was passed in work on the various points that seemed to be of interest, but without much gain.

It was eight o'clock when the detective left the house and took his way further down-town. He wanted to see Barlow Craig again, and, also, to question others who had known Lucas Hammond in that part of the city.

A glance at Hammond's life when he was not at Case's house might prove of interest.

Nathaniel found Craig's quarters, but Barlow was not in, and of the persons who were in, none seemed to be able to add anything of value.

The detective was anxious to see Barlow, and, as he might soon return, he decided to wait for a while. The house was poor, mean and ill-smelling, so he concluded to make the wait on the street. He went out and stood a few yards away, watching for Craig.

The night was dark, with a fog sifting along the street, and half-obscuring the sickly lamps that were supposed to give light. Nathaniel could see but a short distance ahead of him, but this did not impress him particularly.

Men and women were passing, not constantly, but frequently. It was, on the whole, a scene of considerable life.

Several minutes had passed, when he observed a man approaching with rapid steps and an air of excitement. He looked to the right and left, as if seeking for something, but halted when near Nathaniel.

"Say," he exclaimed, "have you seen an officer around here?"

"An officer?"

"Yes; the patrolman."

"What do you want of him?"

"I think there is a man breaking into a store on the side street. It is all dark and lonely there, with nobody passing, and he has it all to himself. It's only one, and I wouldn't be afraid to tackle him myself, but I want an officer."

"I am an officer. I will go with you. Lead on!"

"An officer, eh? That's good. Say, we'll nab that fellow, sure!"

Nathaniel did not reply, but followed where his companion led. Their movements were quick, and they soon turned the corner. The side street seemed to be wholly deserted.

"There is a sort of alcove, or half-alley over yonder," explained the guide, pointing. "That's where he is. Walk quickly but carefully and we will have him, sure pop."

They approached the spot, and Nathaniel thought he could hear faint sounds, as if a window was being forced up. He and his guide turned the corner of the building and the recess was before them.

"Ha, look!" whispered the guide. "There he is! Look!"

He seized Nathaniel's arm in a tight grip, seeming to be much wrought up. Just then there was a rustling sound at one side—a sound loud enough to draw the detective's attention away from the supposed burglar.

He saw two men moving toward him, and even then close at hand.

"Look out!" he cried to the guide. "Here's trouble for you!"

There was but a moment to prepare. He tried to use that moment to the best advantage. He tried to turn, to throw up his arms to defend himself, but the guide held fast.

"Let me go!" exclaimed the detective. He tried again to free his arm; again he failed. By that time it was too late to act to any purpose. The men leaped upon him, and he was borne to the earth.

Then the guide dropped squarely upon him with the order:

"Silence him, men!"
"Trapped!"

The truth flashed upon the detective, and he struggled desperately to free himself. He was young and strong, but he had three foes to oppose him, and the odds were too great.

Pinned down, his arms were held, and he was at the mercy of the entrappers. They worked with tremendous zeal, too, and he was soon tied so he was helpless, and a gag was forced into his mouth.

When this was done he was lifted and carried out of the alley. He had not given up hope, for it was not a residential district on the cross street, but he was presently shown that the case was more desperate than he had believed.

A carriage stood by the curbstone, having mysteriously arrived, it seemed. He was hustled in; the men entered with him; the driver mounted to the box, and they were carried rapidly off.

Nathaniel, held down in a cramped position, had time to think. He knew that he had been decoyed, but he wondered why it was so. Who had done it? What was their object?

Suddenly something more occurred to him—the warning of the anonymous letter.

It had been as positive as it was mysterious. It had cautioned him that he was off on a dangerous trail; that he would be menaced by a peril of a sort he never had heard of, and that "the shadowy danger" was on his track.

"Can all this be?" he wondered. "If so, I am going to the peril now—a danger of which I never heard before. What is it?"

He was brave, but it was not mere personal danger that made him suddenly fall into a panic. He wanted to meet nothing secret and terrible; he was startled out of coolness.

He struggled with his bonds! it was all in vain.

Presently a handkerchief was adjusted over his eyes, and a few rods further on the carriage stopped. The door was thrown open, and he was hustled out. Where he was or what was before him he did not know. With his arms bound he could not resist; with his eyes and mouth tied up he could neither call for help nor see anything.

Helpless, he resigned himself to the situation with the best grace possible.

There was no delay on the part of the captors. Nathaniel was marched forward, and soon his feet echoed on boards. He was in a house or some other sort of building. Where? He did not know.

Up a flight of stairs he was led, and then into a room. There a pause was made, and he heard whispers a short distance off. After that came a stir, as if somebody were making preparations for something.

Suddenly the pause was broken. Nathaniel was seized anew, lifted, carried

forward a few steps, and then laid flat on something like a table. In a twinkling his captors began to bind him down.

All this was so strange and bewildering that he forgot his helpless condition and struggled afresh. There could be but one result; he gained nothing by it.

The captors seemed satisfied, and he was left alone. He was not satisfied. He heard them moving about, and more whispers came to his strained hearing.

He grew nervous. Why did they not explain their intentions? Why did they not speak in natural tones?

Suddenly they laid hold of him again. His left arm was grasped roughly, and then he felt the touch of a knife. It pricked his flesh. It sent a chill along his nerves. What was to be done?

Up his arm moved the knife slowly. After the first touch it did not pierce the flesh, but he felt his coat-sleeve being slit from wrist to shoulder. Next his shirt-sleeve was served in the same way, after which he knew his arm was bared to the skin. The loose parts of the garments were thrown upward, and the arm was fully exposed.

"He is all ready!" whispered somebody.

All ready for what? Nathaniel did not know, and he never had heard of a case like this. Strapped down, and with bared arm—what was to be done next?

To his mind again there came the warning of the letter.

He was to beware of the shadowy danger—a sort of danger of which he never had heard.

He felt that it had come. He was snared, and the danger was to be met. What was it? What were its objects? Did death menace him? If not, the warning of the letter had been illy expressed.

He felt cold and frightened. Brave he was naturally, but who would want to die like a cornered, helpless animal?

He moved his head restlessly. He felt the bandage move slightly, and then a ray of light came to his eyes from the under side of the cloth. He moved again—this did not displace the bandage, but he had a partial view of the room.

He saw masked men, looking strange and uncanny in the red light which filled the room. At one point he saw one of the party working over a sort of caldron, the vapor of which wrapped him as in a garment.

Somber, ominous party! What was to happen? Why were they there? Why was his arm bared? What was to happen?

CHAPTER X.

THE DETECTIVE'S STRANGE PERIL.

Nathaniel could not get a view as distinct as he wished. Back of himself, or above, he could not see at all, but there was a good deal in front of him. The masked men stood in a group just then, all looking toward that one of their number who stood by the caldron.

He was taller than the others, and a sort of robe began at his mask, and fell below his knees. He might have been black or white, old or young, so far as Nathaniel could tell.

The entrapped detective gave him more heed than the others, because he seemed to be the leader, but little came of it.

Suddenly this robed man stepped away from the caldron. He went to a little case which stood at one side—a thing that looked like a place for surgical implements—and took something out.

He came close to Nathaniel, and the latter saw that he bore a small steel object in one hand, and a bottle-shaped concern of silver color in the other.

He bent and touched the detective's arm, running his hand up and down the member.

Nathaniel shivered. It was like the beginning of some startling performance, and again the warning of the letter came to him. He was to beware of the shadowy danger—a danger unlike any he ever had heard of before.

With a species of fascination he gazed at the things held by the mysterious leader.

The silver bottle was simply beyond analysis, and the steel implement was little less puzzling. It was not a knife, and what it was the detective could not guess. With a cold horror creeping over him he awaited the elucidation of the mystery, with an unnatural interest—he was weakening mentally under the strain, perhaps.

Presently the leader turned abruptly and went back to his caldron. He shook the little vessel, and the vapor rose more thickly. This seemed to please him, and he turned to his men.

"Get ready!" he ordered.

Nathaniel shivered. Ready for what? He was to be the central figure in the event; he was interested. Ready for what?

The leader took a glass and poured out some of the liquid from the caldron. Then he came briskly forward again.

"Be prepared to obey me fully and quickly," he directed. "Here, you hold this fluid. The rest of you grasp his arm tightly. We must lose no time."

Nathaniel was stirred to desperation. He knew not what they intended to do, but the mysterious nature of everything was too much for his composure. He struggled fiercely; he tried to break his bonds; he writhed on the table until it creaked and trembled.

"Hold him fast!" sharply commanded the leader.

Roughly the men seized the detective. If he had not been helpless before they would thus have made him so, but they simply added to his condition.

The bandage over his eyes slipped once more, this time the other way, and all view ceased. In total darkness the luckless prisoner had to await the next turn of events.

There was a rustling sound as the captors rearranged themselves, and then, besides the hold of the minor plotters, the detective felt the peculiar touch of the leader.

The mysterious ceremony was about to begin.

Breathing hard, Nathaniel awaited the destiny before him. If it was to be death he would try to die like a man.

A brief lull, and then—what was that?

Heavy footsteps sounded; somebody was rushing across the floor at full speed. An exclamation of alarm rung out close to the detective.

"Look out!" somebody added, excitedly.

Nathaniel heard a blow—a fall. Then came a medley of confused sounds. Blows seemed to be given and received; cries of alarm, rage, and pain echoed through the room.

Men were fighting. Who? Had help really come for him?

Back and forth surged the contestants, and all the while he was helpless and speechless. A child could not have been more fully useless than he. He writhed—in vain. He tried to cry for help—he could say nothing.

The fight receded. Heavy sounds were made at the other end of the room. Then—all of a sudden utter silence fell upon the scene. He listened breathlessly. Presently soft footsteps became audible. He felt that somebody was by his side. A cold substance touched his wrists; the ropes that held these members fell away.

Something was thrust into one of his hands. His fingers closed upon it; he felt, rather than knew, that it was a knife. He held it fast, resolved to use it, if need be.

Another lull. The seconds wore on, but not a sound disturbed the utter stillness of the room. He supposed the last mentioned man to be by his side, but there was no evidence of it. The stillness was impressive, strange, and productive of nervousness. Nathaniel grew to feel like a bundle of nerves. If friends had come to him why did they not make themselves known further?

Suddenly his wits returned to him. He had the knife, and his hands were free to use it. More, he had the power to free his eyes.

He tore off the bandage.

He severed the bonds that held him to the table.

He leaped to his feet.

He was alone in the room. The light still burned, but it revealed nothing but the common furniture of the room. Men, caldron, and mysterious implements were alike gone.

The detective was bewildered. He could not understand it. The first party might have fled for safety, but why should the victors disappear so strangely?

For a time he could hardly believe the evidence of his own eyes. Where was the caldron?—where the men?

It was not long before his mind reasserted its usual powers. His questions he could not answer, but he had the ability to act. Holding the knife firmly he moved to the door and opened it. A light showed in the hall, but there was nobody there. He went down the stairs, and no one challenged or molested him. He threw open the street door—all was peaceful outside.

He saw no one on the whole block.

"Amazing!" he muttered.

His courage was all aroused, and he determined not to leave until he had made an effort to see into the affair more clearly. He opened the parlor door; there was no one there, and not the sign of furniture or occupancy.

He went further, and, in a short time, had satisfied himself that the house was unfurnished except for the one room where he had been so dangerously placed and, further, that he was the only person then in the house.

"It passes my comprehension," he muttered. "I can't grasp it at all, but—I am free, and I will look further."

He hastened out of the house. The block was still quiet, and it would have been deserted had it not been for a drunken man who was trying to support himself by a railing, and swaying to and fro eccentrically.

The detective hurried to his side.

"How long have you been here?" he demanded.

The disciple of Bacchus swayed more than ever, but fixed a pair of watery eyes upon the questioner.

"Whas—whas—whas is that?" he inquired.

"How long have you been here?"

"Since las' Chu—Chu—Chuesday," stammered the inebriate.

"Did you see men come out of yonder house lately?"

"Shuspect I did."

"Where did they go?"

"Saw them walking off on their heads, las' time I shurveyed them."

"Who were they?"

"Zey didn't leave their cards."

"Were they fighting?"

"Didn't see them fight."

"Were there two parties?"

"Twelve or 'leven parties, boss."

"How long have they been gone?"

"Went 'bout quazzer—quazzer 'nour before 'leven o'clock."

Nathaniel made a gesture of disgust. What was the use of questioning this swaying, blear-eyed drunkard? He was turning away when he was questioned in return.

"Sh-sh-shay, mister, wuzzer masser with your arm? It's got out inter public view, an' looks cold."

The detective glanced down at the severed sleeve. His arm was bare to the shoulder. He drew the garments into place as far as possible, and stood looking at the house where this strange adventure had taken place.

"Wanner prove an alibi?" proceeded the swaying man. "If you do, shust call on me—Diogenes Walker; that's my name."

Nathaniel did not answer. He was not yet done trying to get track of his kidnappers. He went to the house nearest to that where his adventure had taken place. He rung the bell, and, though the hour was then late, persevered until he aroused the inmates.

He questioned them, and was informed that the other house had been vacant for a year, and that nobody had been seen about it lately.

The mystery was deepened.

CHAPTER XI.

SOMETHING ABOUT A CARRIAGE.

The detective turned away from the house in deeper bewilderment than ever, and he saw no way of getting light. Diogenes Walker was lurching off down the block, but Nathaniel had had enough of questioning him. He, too, moved slowly away, meditating on his adventure.

"It passes my comprehension. I was rescued by men who came in the moment of my direst need. They fought bravely and won, and they then disappeared before I could see them. Strange thing to do! Why did they go thus?"

Other things that were peculiar soon impressed him.

"They did enough to make my escape certain, yet they did not cut my bonds wholly. Why? It looks as if they didn't want me to get off the table too soon. Did they take that way to avoid being seen by me? If that was it they were strange rescuers, indeed!"

Again came recollection of the mysterious warning he had received.

"I was told to beware of a shadowy danger—of a danger the like of which I never had seen or heard of. Did I meet it? I think I did, but I am none the wiser. The severed sleeve, the bared arm, the ominous preparations for—what? Even now I do not know what they contemplated. All this was foreseen by the man who warned me. Mysterious affair!"

Nathaniel was doggedly bent on pursuing his investigation, and, when his wonder had abated a little, he determined to see Barlow Craig, if such a thing was possible. He arranged his severed sleeve so that the mutilation showed but little, and then went to Craig's humble quarters.

This time Barlow was in, and he greeted Nathaniel with warmth.

"Have you arrested him yet?" was the first question.

"Who?" inquired the detective.

"Jonathan Case."

"No."

"Do it! He's the man who killed Lucas Hammond."

"Have you anything new?"

"No."

"Then how do you know what you assert?"

"Why, man, it's plain as skippers in cheese!" declared Craig. "Who else should do it? Hammond was there ter sell the diamonds ter Case. Of course the old man killed him ter get them."

"Mr. Craig, have you told all you can about Hammond?"

"It is just as I told you. I met Hammond, an' he took a fancy ter me, an' we got chummy. He knew I was poor—I be," added Craig, with a look at his disreputable clothes; "an' he wanted ter give me a lift. He showed me the diamonds, an' said we would be partners, an' he would make me rich."

"He told you the diamonds were smuggled?"

"I told you before that he didn't, but that I suspected it. He had just come from Brazil, an' he was short o' money. The sparklers was all he had. That shows they was smuggled."

"And you still suspect Case?"

"Sure! I've been thinkin' of it ever sence I seen you. I think I am right in sayin' that Hammond claimed some sort o' relationship to the Professor. Anyhow, he said the old man was none too scrupulous ter snap up anything that promised cash, an' he knew he could sell the diamonds ef Case could raise the price."

Nathaniel was silent, and Craig went on:

"Ain't it all clear? Case saw a way o' gettin' them cheap, an' he got them."

"Do you remember that Hammond was far more muscular than Case?"

"Yes, an' I remember that Hammond

was killed by a blow on the back o' the head. Muscle don't count when a feller gets a clip that way unawares."

There was no such thing as turning Barlow Craig from his belief, and, as nothing more could be had from him, Nathaniel left the house, went home, and retired.

"I wonder," he mused, "if I am in peril from the shadowy danger in my own room?"

If he was it did not manifest itself then, and he slept well.

He decided to go at an early hour to the block where the body had been found. Not yet was he satisfied that nothing was to be learned there, and he determined to canvass the neighborhood anew for possible traces of the night tragedy.

First of all he went to the house where Basil Bowen had lived. He found the numerous tenants even more stubbornly satisfied that Basil was innocent than before, but he learned nothing from them.

Next he went out on the street. Idlers were plentiful there, and he proceeded to question them. All declared they had seen and heard nothing of the affair.

Wherever he talked he had a group of listeners, and it was during the conversation that the voice of a small boy suddenly rose from the outskirts of the group.

"It was right at that door that they laid the drunken man," he remarked.

It seemed wholly inappropriate to the subject under consideration, and a bystander sharply exclaimed:

"Get out with your nonsense!"

"I want to know about the drunken man who was laid there," interposed Nathaniel. "Here, boy, what about the drunken man?"

"Why, the carriage broke down, an' they laid him there, jest by the door where Basil Bowen lives."

"When was this?"

"Night before last."

"The same night of all this trouble?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was it really in the evening?"

"Oh! no; it was 'way after twelve o'clock. I had been over ter the docks with the kids, an' I got home late."

"Jimmy, here, is a regular night-owl," explained a man.

"Tell me all about this thing that you saw," added Nathaniel.

"Why, the carriage was comin' through the street fast, an' it must hev hit somethin'—it went all ter pieces, the eks did, an' down it went."

"Broke an axle and went down, eh? What then?"

"The men got out, but they couldn't do much. The eks was broke all up, an' the carriage wouldn't go no more. One o' them was drunk, an' he hadn't got out, an' they reached in, took him out, an' carried him ter the sidewalk, an' laid him in the doorway."

"What then?"

"They rigged up a board under the eks so they could move the carriage, ef there wasn't nobody inter it, an' then they all went off but the drunk man."

"Do you mean that they left him in the doorway?"

"Yes, kinder propped up against it."

"What did he look like?" continued Nathaniel.

"I couldn't see how he did look."

"Surely, you don't think, mister, that the drunken man killed Lucas Hammond?" questioned one of the group.

Nathaniel did not think anything of the sort, but he had conceived a certain theory, and he ignored the questioner and kept on with the boy.

"What more, my lad?"

"Nothin'. The men all went off out o' sight, but the one that was drunk, an' I went home an' went ter bed."

"The drunken man was still in the doorway?"

"Yes."

"Now, how do you know he was drunk?"

"Why, of course he was."

"Did he act like a drunken man? Did

he talk thickly or act blindly, as if destitute of his senses?"

"He didn't talk ner act; he didn't do nothin' but jest lay limp as a rag. That was how I know he was drunk—yes, an' he must hev been 'way gone, too."

"Which way was the carriage moving when you first saw it?"

"Et was comin' from the river."

"Where was it when you first saw it?"

"Jest about ten feet from where it broke down. Jest as I seen it, there was a crack, an' then down she goes!"

"Do you mean that the man was carried to the sidewalk without the least motion or sign of life on his part?"

"Yes."

"And this was at what time?"

"I went right inter the house, an' it was then half-past two."

Nathaniel had heard enough. From the first there had been evidence that the victim had been dead longer than it was to be expected he could lie on the sidewalk unnoticed by passers-by and the patrolman. Now, it was plain to the detective that the body had been brought to that point in the carriage—that he had been the supposed "drunken man."

The crowd was not a brilliant one, and none of them gained the same idea. They joked the boy, and, while they were talking, Nathaniel walked away.

"The carriage was coming from the direction of Professor Case's house when first seen," the detective mused. "This may, or may not, mean something. Did it start from Case's? Did he slay Lucas Hammond in his house, and then have aids carry the body off? If so, he has made confidants—a dangerous thing to do."

A little further musing; then Nathaniel added, aloud:

"I will call on Jonathan Case again!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE LION IN HIS LAIR.

Doomsday Den looked as bleak as ever. The sun shone, but it could not turn the weather-beaten walls into even a semblance of good looks. Too many years had they stood exposed to rain and sun, and then the bleakness of the whole place made Nathaniel Rand wonder that the professor could find it an endurable place in which to live.

He passed up the decayed wooden walk, reached the door, and plied the knocker. A colored man made his appearance.

He was a sleek, fat person, and his face was the picture of good humor, but it was not an intelligent face. The brain above it was slow and clumsy, it seemed.

"Is Professor Case in?" asked the detective.

"No, sah, the professor am absent on some plenipotentiary excursion."

"What?"

"Plenipotentiary means professional business, sah," explained the colored man, with an air of profound satisfaction with himself.

"Thank you for the definition; you should edit a new dictionary. Do you know where he has gone?"

"No, sah, but I reckon it is somethin' about the Oil of Hygeia."

"What the dickens is that?"

"The Oil of Hygeia, sah, is a liquid drug of transcendental magnitude on which he am experimenting. He, he! I should say he was experimenting! Been at it fifteen years, sah!"

The good-humored black face expanded, and its owner laughed with almost convulsive amusement.

Nathaniel did not feel interested in the matter, but he wanted to get into the man's good graces.

"Why, that's a loss of time, isn't it?"

"Loss of time! Why, sah, he's lost more time than two clocks could keep. Jest a-poring over that Oil of Hygeia, all the while. Glad I ain't a professor of abstruse skiences."

"May I ask who you are?"

"My name, sah, is Patrick Henry High, and I am the court ambassador and servant to the professor."

"I am glad to meet you, Mr. High. I have heard of you. When do you think Mr. Case will return?"

"Don't know, sah, but he will come around presently and pore over the Oil of Hygeia some more."

"Is Mr. Gabriel Redaxe in?"

"Oh! yes; he's always in. Sure! He sets all the time in that big chair o' his, and thinks, thinks, thinks! And then that long staff o' his, it goes thump, thump, thump, and his foot beats time on the floor, and he keeps on thinking."

"Will you say to him that I wish to see him?"

Patrick Henry High said he would, and he disappeared with Nathaniel's name and errand duly committed to mind. He was not gone long. He returned with the information that the ex-detective would see the visitor, so, once more, Nathaniel climbed the stairs to the blind man's room.

He had not lost any of the awe that the fame of the retired master of detective craft inspired, and he walked into the room with as much deference of manner as if its occupant had been the head of the detective force of the City of New York, and possessed of full powers of vision.

Gabriel Redaxe was there, seated in a bolt upright position, his sightless eyes directed toward the front. Again he recalled to the visitor's mind the resemblance to a lion, with his powerful frame and bushy hair.

Rand hesitated, as modest as ever in such a great presence, and then Gabriel Redaxe's staff came down on the floor with two quick thumps.

"Well, well, sir?" he questioned, impatiently.

"Pardon me, Mr. Redaxe, if I intrude—"

"Who said you did?"

"No, one, but I thought perhaps—"

"Sit down!"

The veteran was as imperious as ever, and Nathaniel obeyed with striking diffidence.

"Well, young man," pursued the blind man, "have you caught your game yet?"

"I regret to say I have made no material advance in my work of unraveling the mysterious murder—if mysterious it is."

"No more arrests?"

"None, sir."

"What have you learned?"

Nathaniel heard the question with uneasiness. Gabriel Redaxe, as a detective, had, as far as he knew, possessed a spotless reputation. Now, however, he was off the force, and he was cousin to Jonathan Case. Nathaniel did not feel that he could speak plainly. Personally, he trusted Redaxe; professionally, he had no right to be communicative.

"Of course, all points to the guilt of the man under arrest, don't it?" pursued the veteran.

"Basil Bowen has not cleared himself."

"And have you cleared him?"

"No."

Down came the staff with a sharp thump.

"How drifts the evidence, young man?—how drifts it?"

"I am not able to say, as yet."

"A detective should never be at a loss for theories. What makes the successful detective? Inspiration, sir, inspiration! Unless a man has inspiration you may hammer logic into his head and teach him a dictionary full of methods of procedure, and he will never be more than a clod of the fields. Have you inspiration?"

"Not enough, I fear, to ever make the reputation you have, sir."

The staff descended with unusual sharpness.

"Huff, huff; huff!" scornfully muttered Gabriel.

"I am sincere, Mr. Redaxe."

"My services are not on exhibition, young man. It is you who are engaged. How goes your work? Have you inspiration? Or is it only the sickly tremor of a candle? Work! Think! Act! Succeed!"

Abruptly, brokenly, the veteran jerked out his words, and yet, to Nathaniel, he was an oracle of wisdom.

"I trust I shall deserve your interest, in the end, sir."

"Interest? Who said I was interested?"

"I merely inferred it."

"Tut! tut! tut! Don't infer."

"Pardon me, Mr. Redaxe."

"Eh, eh? Oh, I think I understand you. You think I will give you some suggestions as to how you should proceed. I shall not do it. I say this firmly, but kindly. I know nothing of your case, and, even if I did, I am not a teacher of detective arts."

Nathaniel's face flushed. Gabriel had spoken rudely, and so unjustly that he was chagrined.

"Believe me, sir, I had no intention of asking for aid. I am not without hope of learning all I wish, and alone."

"Go on, young man; look into it all you wish. Maybe you are right in refusing to tell me your case. Go on! One thing, though!"

Mr. Redaxe thumped the floor most viciously.

"Bear in mind that we know nothing of this Lucas Hammond, his business or his fate; he did not die through neglect of ours. He came to sell his tropical plant to my cousin, the professor, and that was all. We didn't know Hammond; he was nothing to us. My relative will tell you so, and his position is assured. My cousin, sir—Professor Case! There can be no question as to his position. A wonderfully skillful man in his calling, sir!"

"I have heard of his skill."

"Properly, too—very properly. As for this Hammond fellow, we both wish you success, but we know nothing of him."

The door behind Nathaniel opened quietly, and Jonathan Case walked in with deliberate movements.

"I think, Cousin Redaxe, that—oh! I beg pardon, the detective is here."

Jonathan had broken off suddenly; he now bowed to Nathaniel and waved his slender hand urbanely.

"I am pleased to see you, Mr. Rand," he added. "I trust you have come to tell us that the mystery of Hammond's death is solved."

"If it is I have not done it. I think it is unsolved," Nathaniel replied.

"Has not the Bowen man confessed?"

"No."

"He should be made to do so. The police are too easy with men known to be guilty."

"We must first hem the guilty man in, sir."

"Have you a doubt as to Bowen's part in it?"

"The case seems clear."

"Assuredly so. He was caught in the act. That settles it, does it not, Mr. Redaxe?" and the Professor appealed to the veteran.

"A good head of the detective force would soon weed out a man who could not see into this case," replied Redaxe, bringing down his cane again. "Still, all can't be done in a day. This will soon be wound up. Does Bowen seem to dread the electric chair greatly, Rand?"

"I have not seen him of late."

"Do so! Interview him. Unless he is made of steel he will soon break down. Eh?—what's this?"

Patrick Henry High had entered the room. He bowed and announced:

"A young woman to see the Professor. Her name is Yettol Hammond!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SMUGGLER'S DAUGHTER.

It was a surprise all around, and Patrick Henry High was kept waiting for his answer. Nathaniel Rand was keenly attentive. He looked sharply at Professor Case. The latter was looking down at the floor as if at a loss what to do. He seemed worried in the slightest degree.

Something made Nathaniel glance at Gabriel Redaxe, and he was surprised more than ever. The veteran had leaned forward, and on his face was an expres-

sion of the most acute interest. Something more was there—Nathaniel was seeking to read it when Redaxe slowly sunk back, and his face assumed its old, leonine expression.

"Huff, huff!" he breathed. "Who is this person, cousin?—this Yettol Hammond?"

"Well," deliberately answered Case, "the name would imply—"

"Hammond? Yes, yes!—it is the same as that fellow's. Possibly she is a poor relative who seeks alms. Huff, huff! Of all things to be abominated a woman nosing around is the worst. Still, I am curious to see this person. Suppose we see her here?"

Nathaniel divided his attention between the two men, so different, yet each so impressive in his way.

Now he saw Professor Case turn and gaze fixedly at the blind man. Nathaniel could almost have asserted that it was a gaze of uneasiness.

"We can soon be rid of her," added Redaxe.

"We have company here," reminded Case.

"Maybe he will not mind, and we surely don't."

Jonathan's gaze flitted to Nathaniel. There was a question mark in it, and, if Nathaniel read aright, the professor was wondering if it was safe to refuse—if it would thereby add to the young detective's suspicions.

His decision was soon made.

"Show the person up," he directed.

Patrick Henry High retreated, and when he returned Yettol Hammond was with him.

She had clearly not expected so large an audience, and she paused and looked before speaking. Her gaze flitted from one to the other, and it missed but little. Gabriel Redaxe sat like a statue, but the other men were attentive enough of appearance.

"Well, miss?" mildly questioned Jonathan Case.

"I came here to see—"

"Me, I understand. I am Professor Case."

"I did wish to see you. I am Yettol Hammond, daughter of Lucas Hammond."

"He met with a sad fate."

The girl's eyes flashed suddenly.

"Do you deplore it so much?"

"Human life is sacred."

"Do you so regard it?"

"Assuredly."

"Then save the life of an innocent man!" cried Yettol, with passionate force. "Basil Bowen is innocent—save him!"

"Really, miss, I have no part in it, one way or the other. I can comprehend how you grieve for your good father—"

"He was not a good father!" she flashed.

"Ah, ah! you must not say that."

"I speak only the truth. He has never given me love or protection; he has given me harsh words and brutal treatment, and he has left me, even as a child, to shift for myself."

"Business may have called him—"

"We will not discuss his qualities of heart, sir. He is dead, and Basil Bowen is under arrest. I ask you to save him."

"Me?"

"You!"

"What can I do?"

"Tell how Lucas Hammond died."

"Ask the police!"

"I ask you. My father made his home here, or, at least, was here much of the time. I have been told that he tried to sell you diamonds he had smuggled into the country—"

Jonathan stretched out his long arms, showing the absolute plainness of his dress.

"What should I do with diamonds?" he asked.

"I know not; I know not. Don't ask me to be logical; all I can think of, or speak of, is that unfortunate man now falsely accused of murder, and held in the clutches of the police."

Professor Case shook his head slowly.

"I am sorry for you."

"Prove it! Basil Bowen's good, noble, innocent. Save him, I beseech you. It will be easy, if you try."

"Child, how can I do it?"

"You must know how Lucas Hammond died—"

"Do you accuse me?"

"I accuse nobody, for I know nothing about it; but it was here he came on important business; here that he brought his diamonds—"

"I saw none; heard of none."

"He had them, report says—I know nothing about it—and it was here, where he had them, that danger would grow up around him. It is easy for you to calculate his chances, dangers, points of menace. You must have some theory."

"I regret to say I have none. Mr. Hammond came here, but he showed no diamonds. He did talk to me of a foreign plant said to be miraculous in its nature, and he asked me to buy it of him. I had not the money, so I had to decline. That is all I know."

The Professor spoke with the air of a man who had finished his remarks, after having covered the whole ground. He had been temperate and patient, and, if he had any guilty secret, he was showing remarkable nerve—but Nathaniel had before known that Prof. Case had the nerve.

Quiet as the devotee of science was, Nathaniel could read that much easily.

Gabriel Redaxe had nothing to say. His keenly attentive attitude was no longer perceptible. He sat at his ease, showing nothing but dignified attention, but Nathaniel Rand was not prepared to believe he was inattentive.

The veteran, however, was motionless, except that one of his feet moved slightly, beating an inaudible tattoo on the floor.

Yettol had not confined her attention to Professor Case while she talked. She had looked at Nathaniel, whom she easily recognized, and at the blind man.

Mr. Redaxe seemed to interest her most, and, when the pause had grown uncomfortable, she turned to him.

"Sir," she added, "will you not intercede for me?"

Gabriel appeared to know at once who was meant.

"I shall have to refer you to my cousin, the professor," he answered. "I am a crippled man, sightless and helpless. I have no chance to see what is done, and no way to take part in it. Professor Case will advise you—he is a man eminent in science—his position is not uncertain; it is assured."

It was, on the whole, a speech singularly benign for the rough old veteran, and yet there was no trace of sympathy for Yettol.

He left her to Jonathan, and that did not mean anything promising.

The girl was uncertain. She had come there feeling that something might be done in the house for her lover, but she did not understand what ground was under her feet, and she did not know how to proceed. She had made a half-hearted effort, and she had failed.

Her whole manner showed that she was at a loss what to say or do next.

Jonathan Case was not uncertain.

"We regret, miss," he politely observed, "that we cannot aid you. We would suggest that you get a good lawyer. If Basil Bowen is innocent, he will have no difficulty in proving it. The law makes no mistakes."

Prof. Case said this as if he believed it, but it was poor consolation for Yettol. One believes more fully in the law when it has decided in one's favor than when its verdict is pending.

Yettol seemed uncertain whether to proceed further, but a new turn came to events just then. Once more the door opened, and this time another woman walked in.

Nathaniel realized at once, by the absence of outer garments, that she belonged in the house, but who she was

he did not know. She was slight and deathly pale, but did not seem in particularly poor health; there was considerable strength back of her pallor.

The face was a strange one, and fascinating in its wide deviation from prevailing types. Besides being so remarkably pale, it was almost expressionless, and Nathaniel gained the idea that she was weak of mind—there was a vacancy there, and a dreamy something that was very striking.

In point of age she was between forty and fifty-five; it would have been impossible to guess nearer.

This woman came to a halt and looked at each member of the group before her. A more lack-lustre gaze it would have been hard to imagine. Her eyes were good, and she saw all, but there was no animation, life, or expression in her face.

She finally centered her regard upon Yettol.

"Are you my niece?" she asked, like one in a dream.

The girl started and looked in silence. Jonathan Case moved quickly forward, but the new comer did not heed him.

"I am told that Yettol Hammond is here," she proceeded. "If that is so, I want to see her. I am her aunt!"

CHAPTER XIV. THE PALLID WOMAN.

Nathaniel Rand was listening and watching with eager attention. He had possessed no means of surmising who the pallid woman was, but, when she made the last avowal, he suddenly recalled the assertion of the citizen that Lucas Hammond had been a relative of Jonathan Case.

Now, the Professor was outwardly calm, but he went to the side of the woman, grasped her arm, and, Nathaniel could almost have sworn, compressed it savagely.

"Peace!" he commanded, his voice quiet and even, but not wholly like its usual self. "There are callers here; do not annoy them."

"But I wish to see my niece," she replied, like a machine.

"There is no one here that you know. Go, for you will annoy them!"

"I annoy them?" the pallid woman answered, with the slightest exhibition of pride and resentment. "How can that be? I am the wife of Professor Case, and I am mistress of this house."

"We have private business, my good woman. Oblige us by going now."

"I want to see Yettol Hammond, my niece," she persisted, lifelessly.

Yettol moved forward quickly.

"How can I be your niece?" she impetuously demanded.

"You are not!" declared Jonathan. "My poor wife has delusions; do not heed her."

"Delusions?" repeated the pallid woman. "The Oil of Hygeia is not a delusion."

Nathaniel heard the words with fresh interest. Patrick Henry High had spoken of the Oil of Hygeia. Why was it referred to now?

"Hush, hush!" directed the professor. "You wander, Hannah. These good people do not wish to be worried by minor matters. Oblige us by retiring to your room."

He exerted pressure on her arm, and, much against her will, she was forced toward the door.

Yettol moved forward excitedly.

"I want to know why she called me her niece," she cried. "What did she mean? Am I her niece?"

"Don't you know?" Prof. Case asked.

"I do not."

"Then there must be some blot on your escutcheon."

"It is false! There is none. Yet, I do not know what relatives I have on my mother's side. I only know her name was Thersey. Did you know her, sir?"

"I did not," replied Case, betraying some annoyance. "Thersey! Was the name one given in baptism, or a surname? It is indefinite—but I know nothing of it. Kindly drop the subject."

"I must not; I cannot. Her name was Thersey; I do not know her maiden surname. There were family troubles—oh, sir, I beg of you to give me light if you can. You, madam, you said that Yettol Hammond was your niece. I am Yettol Hammond. Did you—did you know my mother?"

The speaker moved forward again with fresh impetuosity, but Jonathan Case put his wife forcibly aside.

"Miss," he exclaimed, his tone not as serene as usual, "I beg that you will not further annoy my wife. She is not well, and any excitement is very bad for her. She would gladly help you, if she could, but she knows nothing. Of course she was speaking at random when she indicated relationship as she did. We have no relative named Thersey; we never did have. She was wholly wrong."

The professor swung his charge around so that she faced the door, and then significantly touched his forehead.

Clearly, he meant that she was not right mentally, and her appearance confirmed his mute statement.

This done he continued to move his wife forward.

"Go, Hannah!" he directed.

He shoved her out of the room with more or less care—it looked like a gentle exhibition of authority, but his touch may have been severer than her uncomplaining submission indicated. Closing the door, he confronted those still present.

"I regret to say," he added, "that my poor wife is mentally deranged. She has for many years been irresponsible, and very weak-minded. She does not know what she talks about, usually. It was so now."

Yettol sighed. She could not deny the statement with memory of that blank, pallid face so vivid, but she would have been less than human had not she remembered words so striking.

She had learned that Jonathan Case gave no promise; she turned again to the blind veteran, who had all along sat with dignified reserve that told absolutely nothing of his thoughts and sympathies—if he had any preference in the case.

"Sir," she imploringly asked, "can you not help me?"

Again Gabriel Redaxe knew quickly that he was addressed.

"Miss," he responded, "you see before you a wreck of humanity; a man long since laid on the shelf. I am out of active life. A child is more active, and more capable of helping himself and others than I am. I will refer you to my cousin, Professor Case. He is eminent in his profession, and a man of vast resources and wisdom. You can look to him."

It was not an unkind reply, but Yettol's face fell. She had already tried Jonathan Case; she knew what he would do, and would not do. She gave up hope.

She turned away from the group.

"I will go home!" she murmured.

There was so much of despair and sorrow in the words that Nathaniel Rand's fullest sympathy went out to her, but he could not express it then.

Nobody asked her to tarry, and no one spoke to her further. In utter silence she passed out of the room and down the stairs.

The professor wiped his forehead and turned an uneasy gaze upon Nathaniel. The latter had discovered that the man of science possessed remarkable nerve and powers of meeting trouble with outward composure, but the interview had been against the learned man, and he could not help but know it.

He looked Nathaniel fully in the face.

"These women!—these women!" he muttered, complainingly.

"The sex, like our own, has its peculiarities," quietly answered Nathaniel.

"My poor wife has been deranged for over ten years. As for the younger woman, she is all demoralized by the death of her father, and that accounts for her strange fancies. Besides, women are never logical, you know."

"That is what some of our sex say. Upon that subject, however, the ladies have a word of their own to put in. We have to let them say it, you know."

Nathaniel had his reasons for not wishing to talk any more with the professor then, so he made his last remarks jokingly, and Case was plainly not reluctant to drop more serious matters.

Nathaniel did not want to have it thought he was seeking to see Yettol outside, so he delayed just long enough to do away with that suspicion, and then took his departure.

Jonathan was full of an affability that told he was desirous of getting Nathaniel's good will, but the latter looked in vain at Gabriel Redaxe for signs of interest of any sort. The white-haired veteran kept his place and patted his foot softly on the floor, but he was reserved and dignified to an extreme.

As far as visible signs went, the sightless lion cared little for the matter one way or another.

Nathaniel had lost no part of his admiration and awe for the retired master of detective work, but he could not see that his interest was reciprocated.

He finally went his way, and was soon on the street.

He went in a confused state of mind. Many thoughts were in his mind—many suspicions—but he was not prepared to say just what he thought of all the things that had been presented to his notice. He had, however, settled pretty confidently upon certain possibilities which he could not yet prove.

He had gone four blocks when he was suddenly hailed by a loud-voiced person, and when he turned, he saw Barlow Craig and a second man. Barlow hurried forward, while his companion hung back, and seemed undecided; but Barlow grasped Nathaniel's hand and shook it with great cordiality.

"Here he is now!" exclaimed the man of hard luck. "This here is Jerry Smith"—a remarkable wink for Nathaniel's benefit accompanied this statement—"an' he's the policy king I told you about. Come right up an' see him. Mr. Smith, this is John White, Esquire. He will be glad ter see ye, Mr. Smith!"

Here Barlow winked again, and the detective understood that, for some mysterious reason, his acquaintance wished him to pass himself off as the alleged Jerry Smith.

He shook John White's hand politely, and, though White did not seem particularly cordial, there was no objection on his part.

"I've been tellin' of Mr. White about ye," added Craig, "an' I wanted him an' you to meet."

"We seem to have done so," remarked Nathaniel.

"Sure! Come in an' set down in this winter garden."

The detective was still at a loss, but it would not do to pass anything by. He obeyed, and the three seated themselves at a table.

White was a man of some thirty-five years. He was stout and rather intelligent-looking, but his clothes were not good, and it was clear he was not in the best of luck. Nathaniel waited for developments.

CHAPTER XV. MYSTERIOUS REMORSE.

Barlow Craig was in a most talkative mood, and he rattled on at a rate which gave the other two men little chance to say anything. This did not seem to worry John White, who sat in silence except when Barlow's direct questions compelled him to answer.

Nathaniel grew more perplexed as to Craig's motives, if he had any, but, gradually, the conversation became more general.

Finally, Barlow began to complain of his career of hard luck.

"I've made it a profession," he averred. "Never could succeed at nothin' else, an' never shall, but at hard luck I'm a high-daddy. Hard luck! Why, I served three terms in prison, an' was only guilty

twice. I got six months fer what I did do, an' three years fer what I didn't. How's that?"

He laughed good-humoredly, snapped his fingers defiantly, and then added:

"Still, I wouldn't swap places with that Basil Bowen, who is inter hock fer doin' up the diamond smuggler."

"There are worse things than being electrocuted," gloomily remarked John White.

"Name one!" directed Barlow.

"Remorse!"

"Never had one. How does it feel?"

"It is a bitter pill!" declared White, sighing.

"What do ye do fer it?"

"Think!"

"A painful remedy," replied Barlow. "I never could stand it. Could you, Smith?"

Nathaniel thought he began to comprehend Barlow, and admired the tact with which he had worked around to the desired point.

"I have had my periods of doubt in my business," the detective replied, assuming a confidential air. "Now, some policy men never get that way. With me, it depends. When I fleece a man of my own calibre, he must take his globules, be the medicine ever so bitter."

"Nobody kin always find a feller o' his own measure, pint fer pint," asserted Barlow.

"I've refunded to beardless boys who mistakenly thought they were bloods, when they were only skimmilk," pursued Nathaniel, sticking grimly to his assumed character. "Then, again, I once did an old man up brown, and I gave him his shiners back. I was ashamed to wrong him. That's my way. Conscience may interfere with our getting rich, but it sort of makes a man sleep better, if he humors it."

"Sleep, sleep!" muttered White. "I wish I could sleep!"

"Can't you?"

"No."

"Modern science has produced fine drugs for all purposes."

"For a guilty conscience?"

"Well, not exactly."

"My conscience is too active. It pricks, pricks, pricks! It is a harrowing thorn in my flesh!" gloomily declared the man.

"We men are all so weak under our careless exterior," murmured the detective.

"Like you, I have had my fling, and sometimes I've carried a good thing off without turning a hair. There's one deed, though, that hurts me more than the man who suffers directly from it."

"Can't you undo it?"

"No."

"Why not?"

White picked away at an imaginary spot on his coat. Barlow Craig secretly winked at Nathaniel, and the latter felt his helplessness, with no insight to the case in hand. What could he do to draw John White on properly?

"Too late!" suddenly replied White.

"Victim in Sing Sing?" asked Nathaniel, bluffly.

White shook his head.

"I will omit telling you where he is. Enough to say that I can't undo my work, and it hurts. I may be below the standard of moral honor, but I am not all knave. Conscience smites me, and it hits hard. This thing has broken me all up, and I am ready to throw up the sponge."

"Can I help you?"

"No."

"I should be glad to do so."

"Useless!" replied White. "I've got to go on and bear this thing. I've done my deed, and it can't be undone. Can the dead be restored to life? Not much!"

"So he's dead, is he?" asked Barlow.

It appeared to be an incautious question. White immediately gave Craig a sharp look, and then he roused from his gloomy mood somewhat.

"We are all getting silly," he returned. "Let's drop it. Mr. Smith, do you take an interest in horse racing?"

The previous subject was ended, and

both Nathaniel and Barlow knew it. The former fell in with White's new subject of conversation, and that was the end of confidences.

A general conversation followed, and then the three left the place. Nathaniel was no wiser than before, but Barlow gave him a secret hint to go light, and he obeyed. Outside, White parted from them, went his way, and left them alone.

"Now, then," exclaimed the detective, "what's all this about?"

"Boss," Craig replied, quickly, "I mistrust that feller!"

"In what way?"

"He knows something about the murder!"

"What?"

"Can't say; but he's gloomy over that—unless I mistake my lead."

"Do you think he did it?"

"He may have been inter it."

"What do you know?"

"I met him by chance, an' we got kinder sociable over a sip of beer. I introduced the subject o' the murder, jest ter be pleasant; an' then he got sad right off quick. He almost shed tears, an' said it was a terrible thing. I thought, first off, that he had the jimmy-jams onter him, but it seems not. He was gloomy as a hearse, an' no crape on the door ter tell whether it was a man or a kid."

"Can't you be more definite?"

"No. He wasn't."

"Did he let fall any word that would lead you to suspect he had anything to do with Hammond's taking off?"

"Only that he was so broken up. What he said an' did when you was around wasn't no circumstance ter the way he squeezed the mournful before that."

Nathaniel shook his head.

"I don't think he had a hand in the killing."

"Somethin' is eatin' of him, an' it connects with the family at Doomsday Den. He kept talkin' about the house an' folks there, an' it was dead sore. I'm sorry there was such a frost when you come, but he wasn't goin' ter be confidential with too many."

"He might be worth keeping sight of, if we had a chance."

"We have. I know where he herds; I've seen him before."

"Keep up his acquaintance, if you wish. Something may come of it."

"Jest my notion. I tell you, there is somethin' in John White, the mournful. Yes, an' I'll have it out o' him or bu'st my eyelids."

Nathaniel again encouraged the idea, but he felt that he had too much to do to waste any time on a man who was simply gloomy. Such men were too common where the human race plot, win or lose, suffer and die.

Not long did the detective linger with Barlow Craig. He left him and hastened down to the piers. He knew that a vessel was in port which plied between New York and Brazil, and he wanted to learn more of Lucas Hammond.

Did or did not the man have diamonds, smuggled or otherwise, in his possession when he went to Jonathan Case's house? Nathaniel wanted to get light on that point.

He found the vessel easily. On questioning the crew, he was told that no such man as Lucas Hammond had ever sailed with them, but when he persevered, and described him carefully, a different reply was elicited. A man calling himself Otis Crosby had come from Brazil to New York at just about the right time to fit Hammond's arrival, and the description of the latter fitted Crosby.

Questioned further, the men said he had possessed plenty of money before the vessel sailed, but had come cheaply. One of the crew, too, remembered that the passenger had said, in a moment of drunken confidence, that he was right from the Brazilian diamond fields, but little attention had been paid to the statement.

It looked as if nothing was to be gained further, but Nathaniel persevered in his intention of talking with all on

board, and, at last, the humble cook gave something more.

He declared that he had seen "Crosby" sell a small diamond in Rio Janeiro before he came to the vessel at all, and that, in his exuberance, he had then proceeded to turn his pockets inside out to show that he had not an iota of money before.

There the discoveries ended, but Nathaniel was satisfied. He had what he regarded as good evidence that Lucas Hammond had brought the diamonds to New York, just as he said. What had become of them?

Basil Bowen did not have them when arrested? Had they disappeared in Jonathan Case's house?

The detective left the vessel, musing on these points. Others might give all their attention to Basil Bowen, but he had other views, and he intended to carry them out.

"True," he meditated, "Bowen had a diamond pin in his hand when arrested, which certainly was not his. He has said that he found it by the body. That proves and disproves nothing. It was not supposed that Lucas Hammond had any set diamonds. Surely, if Bowen had secured all that Hammond had they would have been on his person, for he would not have lingered after doing the deed. I do not charge the crime against Bowen—and yet, he did quarrel with Hammond, and, when the smuggler struck him, he made what seemed like threats against Lucas. I cannot ignore that wholly."

The detective was suddenly aroused from thought. Off a little to one side he saw a man lurching along as if very drunk, describing angles and curves which were very ungraceful and unknown to due forms of mathematics.

"It's the fellow that I saw when I had my adventure," murmured Nathaniel. "Diogenes Walker, I think he called himself. He is still drunk. A shameless vagabond."

Diogenes was moving away, and Nathaniel let him go.

The detective's course was along a dark, narrow street, which was little more than an alley. It was a dismal, forbidding place, but he was so accustomed to such things that he gave it scarcely a thought.

He was tramping along sturdily, when the touch of something on his head caused him to start and try to raise his hand to see what it was.

At that moment, however, a noose-like object settled over his neck, tightened quickly, and clung fast. An instant later and he was lifted from his feet by the same power. A rope had been dropped down, and he was hanging by his neck in mid-air!

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SHADOWY DANGER AGAIN.

The attack had come so suddenly and strangely that Nathaniel Rand had no time to prepare for it, and, besides the instinctive movement of putting up one hand, he did not have opportunity to do anything. As it was, the hand was caught in the noose, and this, while it saved him considerably from the otherwise terrible clutch of the rope, only served to make him more helpless.

He was lifted swiftly, and just when he thought that sure strangulation was in store for him, he was drawn in a little toward the building, so that he bumped against it.

Then strong hands seized him, he was pulled in a different manner, there was a brief period of uncertainty, and he was then landed inside the building.

He had been deftly lifted to the second-story window and there taken in.

The choking touch of the rope had both hurt him physically and upset him mentally, and he was slow to rise to the full power of resistance. Had he been in different trim this would have done him no good. He was pounced upon quickly, and his hands tied securely.

He was vaguely conscious that a dim light was burning in the room, but, be-

fore he had time to see more, he was roughly lifted to his feet and hurried along to a second room.

There a stronger light burned, and he summoned enough will power to look about him more closely. He was surrounded by four men, all of whom were masked so that he could tell nothing of their faces.

He tried to speak; to indignantly remonstrate against this rough usage, but the touch of the rope had been so severe that he could not utter a word.

Only indistinct, mumbling sounds issued from his throat.

One of the men made an imperious motion, and the others seized the helpless detective. With another rope, they began to bind his legs. He struggled as well as he could, but the odds were too great.

He was secured according to their wishes.

Next a bandage was adjusted over his eyes, and view of all things left him. He was facing an unknown danger, and doing it in utter darkness.

In silence he was moved forward a few paces and thrown upon some object which, from previous view, he knew was a lounge.

What would happen next? He was dismayed, and still his powers of speech failed him. He tried to call out, to shout for help, but all to no purpose.

Was his life in peril? He asked the question of himself, and the answer of his judgment was not favorable. Death did seem near to him.

The next step of the expeditious workers was to pass a rope around both his person and the lounge.

"Hasten the task!" directed a low, husky voice.

"We'll have it done in a twinklin'!"

"It!" What was "it" to be?

Somebody seized his arm. Quickly he felt the touch of something else, and a cold object glided upward from his wrist. He believed he knew that touch, and a startling suspicion flashed upon him.

His sleeve was being cut open. He was in the hands of his mysterious enemies of a former occasion!

They intended to complete the unknown, ominous work which had before been prevented. What was it? Mutilation? Death?

Nathaniel writhed on the lounge, but with no hope of escaping the mysterious fate. All hope was gone! He must meet the fate marked out for him! He must—

His thoughts were running thus, but he was suddenly interrupted. A door was burst open roughly. Heavy steps sounded. A cry of alarm—a blow—a rush of solidly-planted feet!

Then the room was full of sounds of violent conflict. Men were fighting. Cries of anger and pain came to Nathaniel's ears. The struggle waxed warm, and was waged all over the room. There was more trampling of heavy feet. Then—

It seemed to Nathaniel that the sounds receded. Did he have a delusion consequent to his disturbed mental condition, or did the disturbance die away wholly?

Deep silence appeared to prevail all around him.

What had become of the fighting men?

Something was thrust into his hand. Instinctively his fingers closed around it.

No word was spoken, and again perfect stillness reigned around him. He was amazed and confused. Presently his mind returned to the object he held. Its form was familiar.

"A knife!" he gurgled.

Quickly his course flashed upon him. He turned the weapon upon the cords that held his wrists. It was something requiring delicate procedure, but he ignored the fact and slashed away. Luck was with him—with one stroke he severed the bonds, and without inflicting a scratch upon himself.

He flung up his hands; he tore away the bandage that was over his eyes; he looked around eagerly.

He was alone in the room.

Two more strokes of the knife and he was wholly free. He leaped to his feet.

The damage done by the rope was abating, and life was beginning to resume its usual ebb and flow. Armed with the knife, erect and defiant, he stood awaiting the enemy. None came. Solitude and silence existed around him. He had the place to himself.

Nathaniel Rand had abundant courage, and, as the memory of his rough treatment came back to him, he determined to have satisfaction. Armed with the knife, he hastened toward the door. Beyond was only darkness, but he ran down a flight of stairs recklessly, and only paused when he bumped up against a heavy object.

It was the street door. He tried it; it was locked.

The silence that still prevailed encouraged him. He had matches in his pocket, and he lighted one of them. A gas fixture close at hand supplied what was needed; he made a light, and had full view of his surroundings.

He was in a gloomy but large hall. He was alone. Closed doors were visible; he tried them, one after another; all were locked.

By this time he could think clearly, and he knew he was in a business house. The closed doors, with the exception of that which led to the street, were those of offices. He again gave attention to the outer door, but it was locked and the key was not visible. He was fastened in, and he knew he could not break down the obstacle to liberty; it was too thick and heavy.

He retraced his steps to the room where he had met with such danger. It was still quiet and deserted. He saw, at first glance, little to interest him. It was sparsely furnished, and without table or bed, yet it seemed to be the room of some person, rather than a business place.

Nothing but the ropes remained to tell of his harsh experience. Nothing? He was not sure of that. His gaze caught the glitter of a small object on the floor, and he hastened to pick it up.

"A surgeon's instrument, I should say. It is much like a hypodermic syringe, though of pattern unusual to me. Upon my word, I believe that is what it is."

Instinctively, his gaze strayed to his sleeve, partly severed, and the full meaning of the affair flashed upon him. Taken in connection with his previous experience, there was no room to doubt, he thought.

"It was the same gang that seized me once before, and now, as then, they sought to make my arm ready for—what? It seems absurd to suppose they could wish—yet, it must be so. This syringe, and the baring of my arm—well, well, this beats me!"

Bewildered, the detective gazed at the little instrument in his hand. If it was what he thought it to be, what could be the object of any man in wishing to use it upon him?

It was something almost beyond belief and wholly puzzling.

Presently his mind took a new turn.

"My rescue is even more mysterious. Twice I have been in the power of these men, and twice have I been rescued. Why? By whom? And why have my rescuers invariably fled, after giving me the means of freeing myself? If they wish to help me—and they surely do—why am I left with no knowledge of their identity?"

None of these questions was susceptible of answer then, but one thing was certain. The person who had sent him the anonymous letter of warning had known what he was doing.

He had been cautioned to beware of a shadowy danger—of a terrible danger of a sort of which he never had heard.

He shivered as he remembered his experiences.

"Twice have I been near to the danger. What is this strange, shadowy, ever-active and wholly incomprehensible

peril? It evades my powers of analysis, yet I realize its secret, ominous presence. My unknown correspondent was right—I do want to beware of it!"

Nathaniel aroused and walked to the window. It seemed to be his only means of escape, but the distance was too great to be leaped. He looked closer and judged that he could climb down. The idea gained, he hastened to try to carry it out.

His physical and mental powers had returned, and he swung himself out. Holding fast to the means of safety he had noticed, he made his way to the sidewalk.

"Well," he murmured, "so it ends. My enemies and friends have alike fled; the street is deserted. So it ends—for now. But will not the mysterious peril come again? I believe it will. I must watch for it, and watch in the dark. I know not my enemies; I know not the nature of the danger, and I cannot expect always to have the mysterious helpers near. Some day I must meet the attack alone. What then?"

Brave as he was, the detective shivered. He could fight a foe openly, but this one was masked, both figuratively and literally; he lurked in the background and struck with cowardly manner, but terrible intensity. A hidden foe could not be met on equal terms.

So much time had gone to waste that Nathaniel did not attempt to find either friend or foe. He moved in a homeward direction.

He turned the first corner and then saw a man only a few yards away. The person was staggering along, as if he carried too much liquor.

"Diogenes Walker!" muttered Nathaniel.

A sudden suspicion came to the detective. This man had been near before the attack; he was now near. Still further, he had been hard by directly after the first of the mysterious attacks.

Could this be all chance? The detective thought not, and he suddenly took on a rapid gait, moved toward and overtook Diogenes Walker. Until his rough grasp was on the man's arm the latter gave no sign of being aware that another person was near, but Nathaniel whirled him around sharply.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded.

Diogenes looked up stupidly.

"Wasser—wasser matter?" he stammered, with drunken incoherence.

"I demand an explanation from you!" exclaimed the detective.

CHAPTER XVII.

SUSPICIONS AND BRUISES.

Nathaniel gave Diogenes a rough shake, but the vagabond took it without resentment.

"Jusser—jusser had a drink of wishy an' seltzer," he stammered.

He seemed to be far gone in drunkenness, but the detective was not to be turned from his purpose.

"What are you doing here?" he repeated, sharply.

"Shust tryin' ter square—er, er, er—ze circle," Diogenes explained, wobbling painfully.

"I demand an explanation from you. You can no longer palm yourself off upon me as a drunkard. There is liquor on your breath, but I suspect it is only a device on your part. I don't believe you are any more drunk than I am. Why are you always near when I meet danger?"

"Wusser—wusser that you shay?"

"You are acting a part. You are no drunkard. You are the instigator of these mysterious attacks upon me."

Nathaniel was getting tired of holding Diogenes up. He jammed the man roughly up against the wall of the nearest building, and there proceeded to have it out with him. The vagabond looked at him as steadily as could be expected, but his eyes were weak and watery, and anybody but Nathaniel would have said he was very drunk.

"You's tne one thasser—that's doin' the attacketin'," mumbled Diogenes.

"I shall attack further unless you speak out. Why have you set ruffians upon me?"

"Dunno what you's talkin' about, mister."

"It is false!"

"Don't—hic!—speak in that severe in-tonashun—shun—shun into— You know!" added the fellow, giving it up. "Don't be shevere with me. Let cats an' dawgs delight to bark an' bite, fer 'tis their nature to, but our little hands was never made—made ter scratch—"

"That will do! Stop your pretense of drunkenness. I say you have set ruffians upon me. Why did you do it?"

"Dunno w'ot you're talkin' about, but I's willin' ter—ter arbitrate. Lesser—lesser have a drink an' call it squ—squ—hare."

Nathaniel was losing patience. He shook Diogenes further, and beset him with harsh words and direct and explicit accusations, but he might as well have talked to the wall of the building. If the vagabond was acting a part he did it well. He continued to appear like a man almost wholly gone with liquor.

The detective gave it up after awhile. There was absolutely no proof against Diogenes, and, between the choice of locking him up on the vaguest of charges and letting him go free, at once, he decided in favor of the latter method.

He gave the fellow a push that almost took him off of his feet.

"Get away from here!" he ordered, angrily. "Get away, and do you keep away from me. I have you spotted, and, if you molest me again, I will take you to Police Headquarters. Do you hear?"

Diogenes said he did, but it was admitted with maudlin unconcern. He again requested the pleasure of drinking with his companion, and shed a few tears when his request was refused.

He did not heed the order to go, and, as this point was wholly immaterial to Nathaniel, the detective himself went. He left Diogenes propped up against the building, swaying back and forth at much risk to his safety of equilibrium.

Nathaniel proceeded homeward.

"I may be wrong to suspect the vagabond," he thought. "He certainly has all the appearances of a man wrecked by liquor, and still adding to the fatal fire that is consuming him. Can it be chance that he is always around when I am attacked by the shadowy danger? Perhaps, yet—well, I don't know what to think of Diogenes Walker."

One thing the detective was certain of, and that was the warning of the anonymous letter had been no idle message. It had been proven well founded; Nathaniel knew now he was menaced by the shadowy danger—a danger of which, it seemed, he never had heard, as the letter said; and could not yet analyze.

When he reached his room he took out the instrument he had found on the scene of his adventure.

"You look harmless," he muttered, "but I would not for a million have your former owner make use of you on me. What would lurk behind your touch? Death? I believe so, but how? In what form? And why am I thus marked for slaughter? The warning note said I had entered upon a dangerous trail. It must be the Lucas Hammond case. Who is my secret foe?"

There was no one to answer, and all of Nathaniel's reasoning could do no more than form vague theories. Some suspicions he did get, but, on their surface, they seemed absurd.

"Henceforth," he decided, as he prepared for bed, "I must do more than hunt for my game—I must watch out for the men who are hunting me. I must beware of the hidden danger, or it will carry me to my grave."

The danger did not manifest itself further that night, and he slept peacefully until morning.

He had just finished his breakfast

when he had a caller. It was Barlow Craig, but the man was not in his usual good trim. He wore a big piece of court-plaster over one eyebrow, and looked generally demoralized. He sat down with a thump.

"Well," inquired Nathaniel, looking at him sharply, "have you been scrapping with a cable-car?"

"Worse!" lugubriously declared Barlow.

"What?"

"Boss, be you willin' ter keep the secret of a pardner?"

"If I can conscientiously."

"A conscience kin be made ter do mighty queer things when our sympathizes all point one way. See this plaster? See these disheveled locks? See this manly frame generally broozed and upset?"

"Yes."

"I've been playin' burglar!"

"You have? What do you mean?"

"Broke inter a house ter rob."

"You are bold to confess it. Whose house?"

"Jonathan Case's."

"The dickens you have!"

"I said stronger words than them when it was all over."

"Why did you break in?"

"Ter git diamonds."

"I think I see."

"Bet yer suspender buckles you do. I was after Lucas Hammond's sparklers—but without any base motive. The man who would take me fer a soft an' downy lamb would believe the moon was made o' green cheese, but I was all right on this deal."

"What did you get?"

"Le's go slow. You see, I says ter myself, 'I'm jest as shrewd as Nat Rand, an' I'll show him a detective turn o' the cards.' I was bettin' my hair-dye that Johnny Case had the diamonds in his house, and that I could go in, get them an' go off with my bluff."

"How could you get in?"

"Slid in when that coon of Case's household, Patrick Henry High, wasn't lookin', jest after dark. The clock struck eight as I passed the basement door on my sly an' furtive mission."

"Well, bein' in thus slick I climbed up ter the second floor an' looked fer a place ter lay the sole o' my foot until the house was all asleep. I went inter one room, an' from there I could see Professor Johnny an' that blind man, Redaxe."

"Case was talkin', an' Redaxe, he was listenin'. The Professor, he had a speech he was deliverin' of. It was about some preparation he had invented—he called it the Oil o' Hygeia—that was ter set the world afire an' cure all sortso' ills. He said future generations would hail him as the greatest benefactor of the human race."

"Redaxe, he didn't seem ter be much interested, ner very full o' confidence in the universal remedy, whatever it may be—I'm told the professor is only a dreamer who never has done much practical in his whole life. So Redaxe, he jest was polite, an' he let it go at that."

"When Case had exhausted his wind, an' proved ter his own satisfaction that he was going to be a great boon ter mankind, he let up. He said he was goin' ter his laboratory, an' he passed up the upper flight of stairs."

"I was left in my hidin'-place as slick as a bug. There I lay fer hours, waiting fer the house ter get quiet, so I could steal the sparklers."

"The blind man was right in my sight, an' there I lay an' watched him. Say, but he is a corker, that feller is. He had nothing ter do but think, but he did that well. Sat there from that time ter eleven o'clock, right in my sight, an' his face was like a gladiator's. Say, he's full o' power—he would have given Alexander, the Great, a hard rub, ef he'd lived early enough."

"All the while he had that staff o' his'n in his hand, an' every few seconds he brought it down on the floor,

jest ter emphasize his thoughts, I suppose."

"Thump, thump, thump! it would go, an' his face was full o' tremendous power. I say it again, that man is a feller with a will like a wall of iron. He's full o' masterful ways, ef he is blind."

"Finally, time wore on an' he an' all the others went ter bed. Their sleep was the hour o' my action. I laughed in my sleeve an' prepared fer my burglary!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

A STUBBORN PURSUER.

Barlow Craig did not seem to feel worried over his "burglary," and, though Nathaniel credited him with sincerity in expressing his motive for doing it, there was some room to think he would not have missed the same chance, anyhow, if he had suspected diamonds were in Jonathan Case's house.

He went on glibly:

"I had sized up the house pretty well, an', by watching them go ter bed, I knew jest about where everybody slept."

"I won't tire ye out by relatin' how I sidled around an' got ter work; I only want ter tell ye how I got these beauty marks onter my face."

"I was in the professor's room, an' poking into things when I heard a little bit of a noise. I started ter look up, but, afore I could do it, somethin' took me a lick an' I was knocked over inter a corner. Oh! I got it hefty!"

"As I sprawled there I looked up fully an' there I see Johnny Case. He had a cane in his hand, an' it was up in air. It come down, an' it took me a crack on the thinker."

"Say, but Case has got muscle you wouldn't credit him fer—yes, an' the way he gave it ter me was a caution. That cane went up an' down, an' I was under it every time. He thumped me, an' hammered me until I happened ter remember I had an engagement down on West Broadway jest then."

"I kept it as quick as I could. I got up onter my hind legs an' departed thence from that house. The back winder was open, an' I took it at one jump. I went through it with Johnny's cane whistlin' weird music close ter my head."

"Here the story ends. I was in the back yard, but there wasn't no trouble in gettin' out when there was a full-sized yard all around."

"I keyed up my legs an' hustled down the street, an', as Case didn't foller, I'm alive ter tell of it. But, say, ef I hadn't run hard he would have made a big increase in the September mortality reports. As it is, I've got these bruises ter remind me that bein' a burglar is safer in an empty house than where the lord o' the castle sleeps with one eye open an' the other a-squint."

Barlow was done, and Nathaniel broke his silence.

"Did you find the diamonds?"

"No. Case come too quick."

"Not a sign of them?"

"No."

"Was Case in the house all the while you were there?"

"Yes."

"And you were there from the fall of darkness to midnight?"

"Yes."

Nathaniel was disappointed. He would rather have heard that the professor was out during the evening.

"You say that you had Gabriel Redaxe under your survey all the while. Did you have Case thus under scrutiny?"

"No. He went to his laboratory."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. I see him go."

"Can you assert that he stayed there?"

"Not positive, but I supposed it."

"You did not hear him come in?"

"No. Oh, I guess he stayed in, fast enough."

Nathaniel was silent. He would rather have had the professor's movements accounted for definitely, but this could not be done.

"One thing more," pursued Barlow. "I'm keepin' in with that queer critter, John White. He's in hard luck finan-

cially, an' he's sociable with 'most anybody. He's seen better days, though; that's sure. He seems ter me like a victim of hard luck, like myself."

"It may be absurd," replied Nathaniel, "but I have requested a fellow detective to look up White's history. I had another commission for my fellow worker and I added this to it."

"That was wise."

"I have only your vague suspicion that he might know of the Hammond case, but nothing should be left undone."

"John White knows something about the folks at Doomsday Den!" declared Barlow, confidently.

"Then we will learn what he knows."

"He was full o' talk of them when alone with me, an' he nearly cried, too. Say, I don't think he's jest right, mentally."

"Then that may account for his mysterious melancholy."

"There's more—there's more!"

"Well, I hope my agent will soon get White's history, and he is so placed that I think he will."

The detective rose, and Barlow took the hint and proceeded to depart. He went fingering his bruises in a gingerly way, and evidently meditating on the strength of Jonathan Case's arm.

"I don't fully know what to think of Barlow Craig," mused Nathaniel. "He seems to be a good-hearted vagabond and stirred on to help me by events, but, menaced as I am by an unseen and mysterious danger, I must watch every avenue and not trust any stranger too much. I will watch Barlow."

Nathaniel prepared for the outer air, and this time he did it with unusual care. He always went armed, but, now, he looked to his revolver with scrupulous care.

Well did he realize that at no time could he be sure that the shadowy enemy was not on his track. Unseen, secret and furtive, the foe might strike at any moment.

"If another blow comes," he thought, "I trust my more than mysterious helpers will again be around. Who are these friends who save me in such a timely manner, and yet take themselves out of sight before I can see them?"

Filled with such meditations as these he went to the street, but, once there, his meditations took a more useful form. He was determined not to be oblivious of anything transpiring near him, and when he walked down the street he watched keenly.

Presently his expression changed somewhat. He had noticed that a certain man had come for three blocks along his own trail.

"Chance or design?" he wondered. "I will see."

He turned from the direct course, and, without making the movement too pronounced, took on a course which, it seemed, nobody would be called upon by legitimate business to pursue.

The other man moved where he led, clinging fast to the trail.

"Followed!" tersely decided Nathaniel.

He had been shrewd in his own manner, thus far, and he did not lose his skill, but he managed to make a full inventory of the unknown follower then and there.

The latter was a man of middle age, and stout and muscular as a gladiator. More, he had the coarse characteristics of one born to a low walk in life, and the hard face of one who had traveled a road of evil-doing, if not of crime, for many years.

"A veritable tough. He follows me. Why? I want to learn. I will give him one more chance to take himself off."

The detective made a few more eccentric turns, but without avail. The man hung to his track and there was no longer a grain of doubt that it was a deliberate pursuit.

"I must settle this right here, and I know of no better way than to see him in person. It would be poor satisfaction to scare him off, or evade him by strat-

egy. I'll have a word with him, unless he is too cunning for me."

With this resolution Nathaniel turned sharply on his own course and moved toward the rough man.

The latter was quick to detect this change, and his speed slackened. He seemed in doubt whether to run or keep on, and, before he had much time to think it over, the detective was close to him.

"Well, what are you doing here?" sharply demanded Nathaniel.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN THE CELL.

The question was squarely, clearly put, and the man had to meet it. He seemed quite able to do it. He had a bold, reckless face, with a jaw of bull-dog formation, and there was no doubt that he had the courage to do anything he saw fit to attempt.

He had wavered for a while, but he quickly looked the detective full in the eyes.

"Well," he deliberately replied, "I don't seem ter be doing much of anything, do I?"

"Yes," decidedly replied Nathaniel, "You have been dogging me."

"Eh? Me doggin' of ye? Nonsense!"

"There is no nonsense about it. Now, what do you mean by it?"

"What hev I done that's wrong?"

"Played the spy on me."

"Come off!"

"Denials are in vain. I early discovered your espionage. I took peculiar turns to test your purpose; you followed where I led. You have spied upon me. Why?"

A belligerent look appeared on the coarse face.

"I reckon the streets of New York are public property, ain't they?" he demanded.

"They are, to those not in prison. My business, however, is not yours. If I learn that any man has dogged my steps I want to know why he did it."

"Humph!"

"An honest man is not afraid to explain his movements."

"A man with sand ain't afraid ter refuse when a meddlesome perscn gets too inquisitive!" retorted the stranger.

"What is your name?"

"You may call me Rat-trap ef you want ter."

"You are absurd. Have you no explanation to make?"

"Not an explanation!" was the sturdy reply.

"Do you refuse to tell why you followed me?"

"I have not follered ye."

"I say you have."

"Well, I reckon the street is as free ter me as you."

There was not a particle of wavering on the stranger's part, and Nathaniel felt that he was beaten. He could not arrest the man, and as for trying to teach him manners by force, that was not in the detective's line of duty. He could not prove anything against the spy. He could do no more than give it up.

"You destroy your own case by such a course," he answered. "An honest man never fears to make himself known. You can go your way, but of this rest assured: I will not have you meddling with me, and if you don't stop it I shall find a way to make you. Of course, you know who you were following. That fact proves that I may be dangerous to you. Better keep the fact in mind!"

With this Nathaniel wheeled abruptly and walked off. Perhaps he had impressed the stranger somewhat, for there was no retort, and the detective went without further exchange of words.

More than this, his keenest watch, later, failed to show that the pursuit was continued. He finished his journey without further sight of the stranger, and he was sure that the latter had given up the espionage.

What the motive of it at the start was he could not tell, but his mind turned

instinctively to the masked men who had twice placed him in jeopardy.

Had he learned the identity of one, except for lack of name?

"I shall know this person when I see him again, and it may help me more than a little. He will do well to let me alone, after this."

Continuing his course Nathaniel soon arrived at Police Headquarters. Basil Bowen was still there, and he wanted news of him.

One of the inspectors, too, was there in plain clothes, and to him the detective applied.

"Bowen is a cool prisoner," the inspector remarked. "He refuses to have a lawyer, and is taking all the burden upon himself. He is deeply interested in his case, but asserts his innocence, and does not give up hope. More, though we have several times cautioned him as to his rights, he will talk freely with anybody who will listen, since he abandoned his former policy of silence."

"That is not the way of a guilty man."

"Not unless he thinks to deceive us by such a course."

The inspector reached out and took up a single sheet of paper that lay on his desk.

"Here," he added, "is something that has come for Bowen, addressed to him here. Of course we opened it. It will now be delivered, as we fail to see anything contraband in it."

He passed the sheet over to Nathaniel, who read the brief missive quickly. It was as follows:

"Basil Bowen—Keep up good cheer! You are innocent, and you know it. Don't get down-hearted. The police are working, and there can be but one result of their endeavors—your innocence will be proven. Your friends will not desert you, and there is no case against you. Keep up courage."

Nathaniel looked up and met an amused smile on the inspector's part. The latter laughingly inquired:

"What do you think of it?"

"I see you have an opinion," Nathaniel answered. "What is it?"

"This is all a shallow trick on the part of Bowen's friends. Mind you, I do not say the man is guilty, I am not judge or jury. But this is a transparent device to shake our belief in his guilt and not to be given serious thought."

"Has Bowen seen it?"

"I am just going to take it to him. It can do no harm, and we see no reason for keeping it back."

"Inspector, I would like to see the man talk with you. Will you interview him, and let me watch and listen at the door? I want to study him."

"It shall be done."

Bearing the letter, the inspector led the way. Once at the door he posted Nathaniel in an advantageous position and then entered the cell.

Basil Bowen was making himself as comfortable as circumstances would permit. He had taken off his coat and cast it over the foot of the cot and generally adapted himself to the warm weather. Serious as his situation was he was making the best of it, and had been a model prisoner. More than that, since he had settled down to the course he preferred to pursue he had shown a coolness, free from defiance, and a straight-forwardness that was in his favor.

He and the inspector greeted each other, and then the latter, sitting down, passed over the letter. Basil read it carefully; then he looked up.

"Do you know who sent this?" he asked.

"No."

"I see little in it. It is anonymous."

"Yes."

"I do not know the writing, and I think that if any friend of mine had information of value to me, the fact would be more directly expressed. You can keep this letter."

He handed it back with an air of quiet unconcern.

"Have you anything new to say, Bowen?" pursued the inspector.

"No."

"You still assert your innocence?"

"Most emphatically."

"The circumstances of your arrest were unfavorable to you."

"Luck was against me. My explanation should tell all, and satisfy everybody interested. I came home late from legitimate business. When I reached the door of my house I found the body partially blocking the entrance. I looked for a policeman, but saw none. Then it occurred to me to enter the house and get some of the other inmates to assist me—I had no intention of leaving the man lying where he was, like a slain dog."

"You claim that you did not recognize him, eh?"

"I did not recognize him," Bowen declared. "I saw in him only a fellow being who had met his death. At that juncture I saw the diamond pin lying by his side. I picked it up."

"Next, I stepped into the vestibule to pass him. He so blocked the way that this was not easy and when I was once there I found some difficulty in getting at the door."

"This made my progress slow, and while I was yet short of getting in I heard footsteps outside. I glanced out and saw a policeman and other men."

"Instantly it flashed upon me that my position might be misunderstood. I was alone in the vestibule with the dead man. If I had been wise no harm would have come of that, but, unfortunately, I lost my prudence, lost my head. Confused and frightened, I did the worst thing I could have done; I stood inactive, hoping for a chance to enter the house unseen."

"They saw the body; they halted by it. I kept quiet. Fatal act!"

"Each moment that I lingered made my course the more foolish. Not to try your patience too much, let me simply add that I stayed there until I was discovered and dragged out."

"At that time I was still in a panic. Like a fool I refused to give my name or address. I do not know what madness was upon me, but I was too confused to have any sense about me."

"That is the truth. It explains why I was by the body, seemingly hiding in the vestibule. It explains why I happened to have the diamond pin. It tells the truth."

Basil ceased and the inspector took up the conversation.

"What about your quarrel with Lucas Hammond?"

"I had none."

"Report says you did."

"I admit that Hammond abused me. I bore it all patiently, for the sake of another person."

"You told him he would yet be sorry. Was not that a threat?"

"No, no!" cried Basil, eagerly. "I did not threaten him. I only meant that, when the liquor left his brain, his conscience would accuse him of maltreating me."

"You have a good deal to explain away, and you produce nothing but your own word."

"I am an innocent man!" the prisoner declared. "I am the victim of circumstances."

"If you are guiltless I hope you may prove it."

"I feel that I shall. Hope is not yet gone."

"You were seized under peculiar conditions."

"I was by the lifeless body, but it was chance. I never did the least harm to that man."

"Prove it, and all will be well."

"I never was created to die, by law!" cried the prisoner. "I shall escape from this cell."

The inspector was silent, and Basil excitedly added:

"All that I have or hope to be is at stake. I must not, will not die a criminal. In some way or another I shall yet be free."

CHAPTER XX.

THE UNKNOWN ACID.

The inspector bowed politely and rose. The interview might well end when the prisoner failed to do more than assert his innocence without anything further in the way of statement. The officer passed the letter back to its proper owner, and then said a few more words and left the cell.

Nathaniel Rand was waiting outside.

"Well," remarked the inspector, "you have seen your man under moderate fire. You have had a chance to form an opinion of him, and I dare say you have. Can I aid you further?"

"Thank you, no. I will wait here at Headquarters for a while, as I think I may meet men I have asked to do some minor things for me."

They retraced their steps. Nathaniel had not long to wait. The detective to whom he had referred came, and Nathaniel received him with visible eagerness.

"Have you news?"

"I have learned all you wished," replied the second detective.

"Well?"

"I have the family history of the household at Doomsday Den, as it is now constituted. As far as I can learn the family of Jonathan Case is restricted to himself and wife, in the full sense of the word. He has no cousins, even."

"Gabriel Redaxe plainly said to me that, though he called Case cousin, the relationship was distant."

"As near as I can learn, they are second cousins, once removed; the tie is distant, surely."

"And Yettol Hammond and her mother, Thersey. What of them?"

"Thersey's maiden name was Redaxe. She was sister to Gabriel."

"Own sister?"

"Yes."

"I did not think Mr. Redaxe was capable of thus neglecting a blood relative," replied Nathaniel, gravely.

"Wait! Thersey Redaxe was housekeeper for Jonathan Case before she married Lucas Hammond. She and Gabriel, her brother, had quarreled in this wise: When their father's property was settled she accused Gabriel of wronging her in the division, he being administrator. He was grieved and vexed, and he promptly sent her a check not only for her half but his own—in brief he offered to turn over the whole inheritance to her, and practically did so by sending the check."

"Remarkable!"

"Thersey must have been hot-tempered or ill-advised; she returned the check and took only what Gabriel had first proffered as her share, but she never forgave him."

"I fail to see wherein she could blame her brother."

"When Redaxe heard she was to marry Lucas Hammond, he went to her and told her Hammond was not a fit husband for her. He tried kindly to break it off. You can guess the result—outside efforts always make a marriage sure."

"And then?"

"She married Hammond. She utterly cast Gabriel off, and that was an end of it. They saw each other no more. I can well believe that Redaxe wholly lost sight of her, and maybe he did not try to keep track of her."

"The fault appears to have been wholly with her."

"Thersey was willful and obstinate—all accounts say so. Again, there was a difference of nearly thirty years in the ages of herself and Gabriel; their mothers were not the same, and they had never seen each other much. There was the lack of sympathy which would have existed had they been nearer of an age."

"It appears to me there was more to this than you have told."

"Very likely, but I do not know what."

"Does not Jonathan Case figure in this affair?"

"I only learned that he was connected with it as master of his own house, Ther-

sey being his housekeeper, as I have said before."

Nathaniel was silent, but, to himself, he thought that, if all was known, it might be seen that Jonathan Case was the chief factor in the case of twenty odd years before.

"As to your other commission," pursued the second detective, "I have learned that John White was once a broker in Wall street, and said to be successful. He got looney, as one man expressed it—practically crazy for a while—and his business went to smash. He never has rallied since, and, though now sane enough, has lost all grip on himself and everything else."

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"Then John White's history is simply that of a broken-down business man?"

"As far as I have been able to learn, that is all."

Nathaniel looked disappointed. If John White had been ruined financially there was reason for his melancholy. Did that settle John White. Mentally, Nathaniel answered the question:

"Perhaps, but it does not seem to account for all. There may be more. If there is, I may learn what it is."

He soon dismissed his aid, but he was reluctant to leave Headquarters until he had seen another man who was to report to him there. The man came presently. He was an expert chemist and had been on an errand for the detective.

"I have found your suspicions confirmed," he reported.

"My suspicions? I expressed none."

"True, but you told me to go to the undertaker's and see whether the burns on the dead man's face were made by fire or some other thing."

"True."

"They were not made by fire."

"By what, then?"

"Some sort of acid. I cannot say what, positively."

"You are sure that it was an acid?"

"Yes."

"How could the burn have been inflicted?"

"I am at a loss to say," the expert chemist replied.

"Give a theory."

"Possibly it was done in a laboratory, by accident—but that theory does not suit me."

"Do you think them more like burns made by design?"

"Why do you mention design?"

"Because," Nathaniel replied, "the burns are restricted to the face and head of the man—the upper part of his head. If it had been an accident some of the fluid would have splattered, or trickled down elsewhere."

"Just my idea!" cried the chemist. "It looks to me as if the acid had been applied with care for a certain object. What the object was I do not presume to say. I have no theory."

Nathaniel leaned forward, showing marked interest.

"This unknown acid—do you think it would have other action than to burn the skin?"

"It is impossible to say."

"Do you know of an acid that would have done this, and, also, have been capable of striking effects if applied as a hypodermic injection? Suppose it was injected into the arm by means of a syringe, what would it have done?"

"In most probability it would, to speak in every-day language, have burned up the blood of the victim. With its great strength it would have sent burning death along his veins."

Nathaniel's eyes glittered briefly.

"Again," he pursued, "suppose it was used as a hypodermic injection. Would science be benefited? Could a great discovery possibly result from such an experiment?"

"If it could I do not know how."

"Would a scientific man under any condition resort to such an experiment?"

The expert smiled.

"It is impossible to say what a scientific man might do. If the class had not done strange things and taken great risks we should not have the increased medical knowledge that is a wonder of the age."

"Then an acid like this might possibly be used as a boon to mankind, in some way?"

"Decidedly not, in that form. Properly diluted it might enter into a combination that would have beneficial effects, but, applied in such a quantity, and with such strength as is seen in Lucas Hammond's case, no man could live under it. It might benefit by giving knowledge of death, but not otherwise."

"It could not help the living?"

"No."

"Nor be a factor in producing good health?"

"Most surely not."

"Would a man mad with scientific zeal think of using it as a hypodermic injection, just to see the results?"

"If mad in the full sense of the word, yes. Used in full strength, however, he must know his subject would die under it."

"That is all, sir. I thank you for your patience and investigation."

The expert went his way. Nathaniel remained in deep thought. He mused long and deeply, oblivious of all around him.

"The acid was applied to the dead man's face with one of two objects," he finally decided. "If it was the one it changes my whole case. If it was the other, I, too, must be ever on the alert or the shadowy danger will seize hold of me and burn my veins with devilish power."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MAN WITH THE SPOTTED FACE.

Presently Nathaniel aroused, rose and left Police Headquarters. His next move was to pursue an investigation he had before commenced. Since the boy of the block where Doomsday Den stood told of the carriage which had broken down there on the night of the finding of the body, and of the alleged drunken man left at the door, the detective had seen the importance of accounting for the carriage.

Thinking it might be taken to a shop for repairs he had searched for something of the sort, but without success.

Now, he was making a canvass of livery stables to learn what one, if any, had a disabled carriage which would tally with the description.

This day he was near the end of that trail, for, after a couple of hours, he found the connecting link, he believed.

In a livery stable he learned of a carriage with a broken wheel, and, though the boy had said an axle had been broken, the fact that the men had been able to take the vehicle off with the aid of a board seemed to show that the boy was in error.

The keeper of the stable told his story.

"I let it to a man that night," he explained. "He had had it once before, just two nights before, I think. On the first occasion everything was in good shape when it came back. The last time the wheel was broken. He said it caved in on him, but he promptly offered to pay the damage—though he did not look like a rich man."

"Can I see the carriage?"

"Certainly."

It was shown to Nathaniel. At first sight he detected nothing unusual, but he called for a light and searched more closely. He was rewarded in this. On the floor of the vehicle he discovered a small smear of blood.

How it had come there neither he nor the stable keeper could explain, but, as it was not explainable, the detective saw fit to let it point in the direction his suspicions run.

He believed the body had been brought in that very carriage to the place where the break-down occurred.

"Describe the man to whom you let the rig," he requested.

"He was a fellow well on toward forty years old, I should say. He was coarse and like a prize-fighter, with great muscle. He had light brown hair and a reddish mustache, and his face was red and spotted from some cause—beer, I should say. Then he had a tremendous jaw, as if his will was of iron, and all the signs of a bull-dog nature. He had money a-plenty, and appeared to be a prosperous man of the rough-and-tumble sort."

Nathaniel thought he had light on one subject. The description exactly fitted the man who had dogged his steps that morning, and been so severely taken to task by him.

That person had all the points mentioned by the stable-keeper, including the high-colored face of two shades of red.

The detective left the place.

"Pity I did not learn more of the fellow who dogged me," he thought, "but I believe I shall see him again."

The prediction was fulfilled sooner than he expected. The next three hours he was busy on his case, but a part of it had been disposed of, and he was on his return to his own home when he happened to see Professor Jonathan Case striding along not far away.

"Bent on business of some sort!" muttered Nathaniel. "He has a fixed and abstracted expression. I'll see where he goes."

He fell in behind the professor and followed where the learned man led.

Several blocks were thus traversed, and then Case reached a corner and halted as if his journey was over. He looked around for a moment, and then relapsed into inaction and waited. The detective hovered near, screening himself as much as possible, and also waited.

Minutes passed—five, ten, twenty.

Suddenly Nathaniel caught sight of somebody moving toward the corner whose appearance was familiar.

"The man with the spotted face!" he muttered. "Ha! this grows interesting. What will he do?"

The man settled the question promptly. He walked up to Jonathan Case and was greeted quietly.

"Better yet! They know each other. This was a meeting by appointment. They talk earnestly; they seem to be old acquaintances. I am really interested!"

Keeping well concealed the detective continued to watch. For perhaps ten minutes Case and his companion talked gravely and earnestly, and then the former took out a roll of bank-notes and handed it to the man with the spotted face. Evidently this was the errand which had drawn them together, for they did not delay much longer.

They parted, and Professor Case retraced his steps.

Nathaniel allowed him to go. He was more interested in the spotted-faced man, and when the latter set out on his further travels the detective secretly fell in behind him.

It was not a difficult pursuit. The man did not seem to dream of pursuit and he sauntered off carelessly. His course took him to the Bowery, and there he showed more interest. He looked into several windows, and wound up by purchasing a suit of clothes in a store by the way. This done, he turned back and was inside of a house within ten minutes.

Just before entering he passed a patrolman, speaking to him casually as he did so.

Nathaniel let him go, but promptly interviewed the officer.

"Who was that man?" he asked.

"That? Oh, that was Tom Brown, the clam-bird."

"Clam-bird?"

"Yes. Peculiar name, isn't it? You see, Tom's business is clams, and the people have seized upon his calling, and given him that badly-matched combination for a soubriquet."

"What sort of a person is he?"

"Naturally very rough, but I know no evil of him."

"Is his trade, as indicated by his soubriquet, genuine?"

"As far as I know, yes."

"And he is law-abiding?"

"He seems to be. I've been on this beat a year. Tom was an old-timer in this vicinity when I came. He has a face that wouldn't impress a physiognomist favorably, but Nature may have made a mistake in him. He seems harmless enough."

Nathaniel was disappointed in the description of the "clam-bird," but even patrolmen do not know everything, and the verdict in this case proved nothing.

Anyhow, Nathaniel now knew where Thomas Brown lived, and he was glad he did. He intended to watch still further for the man.

The detective went home and had supper. After that he sat half an hour in deep thought. Next, he rose and prepared for the street.

He looked closely to his revolver.

"I want," he thought, "to give these fellows who are bent on kidnapping me full chance to try it again. They may see fit to postpone further action for a while, but I am generous enough not to keep them waiting if they are in haste."

He added a policeman's billy to his weapons and then went out.

He deliberately took his way toward a rough part of the city, and one where too many people would not be passing.

"Now," he murmured, "if the men of the shadowy danger and the mysterious arm-baring propensity want anything of me, let them come!"

For several minutes he walked on, and then there was a break in his peaceful sauntering. A man rushed up to him wildly.

"Say!" he cried, "there's a fire over there. Can you give a lift?"

"Another trap," thought Nathaniel, and, aloud, he promptly added:

"Yes. Lead the way. I will follow."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE TRAP IN THE ALLEY.

Nathaniel Rand made the reply with all of the outward excitement of a man deeply interested in fires, and the stranger seemed very much gratified. His face brightened up at once.

"My sister's house is afire," he explained, "and it will burn up before the firemen can get there, unless there is prompt action. A few men can save it, but I am all alone—my sister's husband is crippled in one arm."

"Make haste," urged the detective, "we should not delay here."

The messenger appeared to have forgotten that haste was necessary, and he seemed willing to stay there and talk indefinitely about the impending destruction of property, but Nathaniel's words aroused him.

"Come on!" he directed. "It is only a step."

"Lead on!"

The man obeyed. The fact that he was in front gave Nathaniel chance to make sure that his billy and revolver were in place and he found them all right.

He firmly believed that he was again being decoyed, but that was just what he wanted. He desired to give the projectors of the shadowy danger proof that he was not always to be an easy victim, and, also, to capture one of the party, if possible.

The guide led on. After a few steps he turned into an alley, and Nathaniel's confidence in his judgment was somewhat shaken by sight of a yellow light of some sort back among the houses—a light which surely did look like a fire.

He hung grimly to his purpose, however.

"Hurry up!" he urged. "It must be getting a good deal of headway!"

"Come right on!"

"I am here."

The detective was there. He was treading almost on his companion's heels

and one hand grasped the billy. He was ready for peace or war, but more anxious for war.

Just ahead of them the alley appeared to widen into a court, and Nathaniel felt that the danger lay at the point of the change, if anywhere. Closer he pressed to his leader.

They passed the corner of the house. Nathaniel swept a quick glance that way. What he saw was just what he expected.

Two men were hovering by the corner, inactive when first he distinguished them, but they were speedily transformed into moving objects.

They darted forward toward the detective.

The foremost bore a blanket as if to throw it over something.

It was Nathaniel's hour, and he did not mind the odds. He swung his club and the man with the blanket dropped from a heavy blow.

A moment more and the detective seized the guide, inclosing his collar in a tenacious grasp. He swung the fellow around and, placing his own back against the opposite wall, held his prisoner before him as a shield.

Man Number Three was taken by surprise, it seemed, and he wavered for a moment. Then it probably swept upon him that there was no such thing as getting out of the trouble.

A fierce exclamation passed his lips, and he leaped toward the detective with his eyes flaming with rage.

The attack was met without a waver. Nathaniel had made a reputation as a patrolman, and he proved he had forgotten nothing. Once more he swung the club, and the blow was true. The assailant was sent staggering back, and almost felled.

By this time the guide had recovered from his surprise in a measure and he rallied to the occasion. He seized the detective by the throat. He soon found it was not a wise movement.

The club was ready for action again, and it fell remorselessly. Three hearty cracks the fellow got, and then he fairly bellowed for mercy.

Nathaniel swept a glance toward the other would-be kidnappers.

Both were rushing forward.

"That's right!" he cried. "I have business with you. Come on!"

They were full of fight, and they had their fill. They attacked him together, and one of them carried a club as ominous as the detective's, but he did not seem so experienced in using it. Nathaniel rained a hail-storm of blows upon them, and, while they did not succeed in getting in one severe blow, he thumped them to his heart's content—and more than to their content.

Dismayed and almost blinded by their rough treatment they lost all desire to tarry there. Unanimously moving they took to their heels and fled.

The detective was left alone with his prisoner, to whom he still held with grim tenacity.

He sent a sharp glance around. The light before noticed was from a bonfire of old boxes, but the vicinity was one that did not please the detective. Besides, there were sounds in the houses around that told of people aroused by the noise of the fight, and he thought it best to get into a safer place.

He half-dragged his prisoner to the street.

It was in this direction that the escaped men had gone, and Nathaniel thought there was a possibility of seeing them again, but the only person visible was a patrolman who happened along just then.

He looked hard at the couple thus revealed to his gaze but the detective opened the conversation first.

"Have you seen men around here, just now?"

"I saw only one, and he was a drunken fellow who lurched around painfully."

Nathaniel was struck with an idea.

"A drunken man?" he exclaimed.

"Yes."

"What was he like?"

"Oh! he was a seedy fellow with bushy hair and a coat that came clear to his heels. He seemed to be wearing an overcoat as a substitute for an under one."

Nathaniel stood speechless. The patrolman had accurately described Diogenes Walker, the weary wanderer of former occasions.

The policeman could not understand what was in his companion's mind, and, as he did not know the detective, he asked for an explanation. Nathaniel had but little to tell, but he convinced the questioner that he was one of the detective force.

He had got more to ask, himself, though.

"That drunken man—what was he doing?"

"Simply reeling along the street."

The patrolman looked back.

"He has got out of sight quickly for one as drunk as he was," he added.

"Let us look for him—though I doubt if he can be found."

"No fear of that. He was so drunk he cannot have got far away."

"I doubt it."

They looked, but they found nobody. The drunken man had gone out of sight completely and mysteriously, the officer thought. Nathaniel let it go at that, but when he had asked for another description and received one more minute, he had no longer a doubt.

For the third time when he was attacked Diogenes Walker had been close by.

"Let me get my eyes on him again!" decided the detective, "and I'll lodge the scoundrel in the Tombs. Of course, he is the instigator of all these attacks."

All this while the prisoner had been taken along. The latter's head was aching from the blows, but he was a resolute rough, and he would not have been so docile if the odds had not been so great, perhaps. Nathaniel proceeded to question him.

"Well, how do you like the situation, my man? More serious than the fire in your sister's house, isn't it?"

"Cuss the luck!" growled the captive.

"What's your name?"

"Ain't got none."

"One thing you have got—into trouble. You have followed a bad leader. Who was it?"

"Ain't got a word ter say."

"I have. You are going with me to a cell. How badly you are used after that depends on yourself, but this I will promise: If you do what I ask you, your punishment will be lessened all I can pull it down. More, I promise you your freedom in a few days. Now, don't you see that your interests demand that you speak out?"

The prisoner did not answer.

"This is the third time your gang has set upon me. This last attack I deliberately invited, because I wanted to show you that I am not always to be beaten easily. I think I have shown it."

The prisoner rubbed his head.

"Cuss me ef that ain't so," he replied.

"Now, you are not the leader of this gang. Who is?"

"I ain't got a word ter say."

"Fool! do you prefer prison?"

"I won't split on a pal."

"You prefer to stand by them?"

"Yes."

"Did they stand by you in the alley?"

"By thunder, there is something in that!"

"They fled and left you to your fate."

"So they did."

"They saved themselves at your expense. Now, will you save yourself or suffer further for them?"

CHAPTER XXIII.

UNCUT DIAMONDS.

The prisoner felt of his head again.

"My pals did me dirt," he complained.

"It wasn't no square deal, an' I don't owe them nothing. What is it you want ter know, mister?"

"Tell me all about this scheme."

"It's like this: My name is Tim Morris, an' I live in that alley. This mornin' a feller I know come ter me an' offered me hard cash to go into a plot with him ter kidnap a man."

"I ain't no saint, but I ain't ever had ruction with the perleec before, an' I kinder held out. His money did the job, though. The event was fixed fer ter-morrer night, an' there was ter be some sort of a device to lure our man here inter the trap."

"We fixed up some old boxes ready ter light, an' then I was ter wait until ter-morrer night an' act when ordered."

"The order got here twenty-four hours ahead o' time. This evenin' I was smokin' in the alley when my employer showed up all out o' breath. He said that our victim had got inter the vicinity by chance, an' that the trap could be sprung this evenin'."

"He hustled me on ter act, an' there was so little ter do that we made the rifle. The bonfire was started, an' then I run out o' the alley an' accosted you. You know the rest—or I do!" and the narrator felt of his head again.

"I only wish your employer had got into trouble instead of you," commented Nathaniel.

"Say, that feller played us dirt. He wasn't inter the fight with you at all. He shirked it, an' jest left us three inter it alone. Say, I call that dirt mean. Where was he?"

"Now," remarked the patrolman, nodding to Nathaniel, "I see why you thought that drunken man was bogus."

"Prisoner," the detective pursued, "you have not told us the name of your leader."

"It was Tom Brown."

"Sometimes called the 'clam-bird'?"

"That's the cowardly duffer."

"It was he who hired you was it?"

"Yes."

"Why had he such a spite against me?"

"I don't know. I asked him that, but he didn't tell me."

"Was there anybody back of him?"

"Not as I know of."

"How about the other occasions you have helped him to attack me?"

The prisoner looked surprised.

"The other— Why, I ain't ever molested you before."

"Sure?"

"Yes. He said he had men enough, but he must have somebody who lived here, or the other residents o' the alley would be against him. He claimed it couldn't be worked without one who lived in the alley."

The explanation was reasonable, and the manner of the man so sincere that Nathaniel had to believe him. If the present assailants were of the same party that had attacked the detective twice before, the prisoner was not one of them then.

He was subjected to a close questioning, but in the end he convinced Nathaniel that he knew just what he had told, and no more.

The detective had not forgotten the remark of the patrolman, and he again turned to him.

"About the drunken man you saw just before I was attacked," he said. "Can it be that he was disguised?"

"I didn't think of it then, but it is possible. His hair was surprisingly shaggy, and his clothes of disrepute may have covered a fat pocket-book."

"Was there any sign that his drunkenness was bogus?"

"As to that, if he was putting it on he was an artist. I never saw a more natural drunken man in my life."

"If you ever see him again, arrest him, will you?"

"Yes."

"Do so, and I will be complainant."

The patrolman made a few unimportant remarks. Nathaniel did not hear them. He was busy with a puzzle.

Who was Diogenes Walker? He never came into the thick of the various fights, as far as the detective knew. That was

the way of a leader; he oversaw all from a distance.

Again, who was he? Nathaniel had grown suspicious of Jonathan Case in certain ways, but it was absurd to believe him to be Diogenes Walker in disguise. He was at least four inches taller than Diogenes.

On the other hand Diogenes was of about the same height and size, generally, as Tom Brown, the clam-bird.

"I have not erred in mistrusting Diogenes," thought Nathaniel. "He is not the worthless vagabond he would have it seem, but the leader of the gang. He is careful to look out for himself, but it cannot be he always is around by chance; it is design, and the explanation is simple. If I can nab him there will be no more trouble from Tom Brown, the clam-bird."

There was no longer any reason for lingering where they were. It was not to be expected that the assailants, already weakened by the loss of a man, would attack the strengthened opposition, so the start was made to take Tim Morris to Headquarters. Nathaniel repeated his promise that he would see Tim through the difficulty as easily as possible, whereupon the prisoner brightened up greatly.

In half an hour the detective was rid of him and homeward bound. He went with his eyes well open to watch for further signs of trouble. There was considerable satisfaction in his mind.

"I have shown these fellows," he thought, "that I am not so weak a sister as I might be. Previous to this occasion I have had, and needed, outside help to get off. This time I fought my own battle. I reckon they will have more respect for my arms and weapons from this on. Lucky I could fight my own battle, this time. My mysterious rescuers were not visible."

The detective stopped short.

"I wonder who those rescuers are? They always come just in the nick of time; they beat my foes and then skip out of sight. Who the dickens can they be? Why do they act so strangely? Why do they, like my foes, keep in the dark?"

There was no answer to the question, and he resumed his course.

Reaching the Bowery he was crossing diagonally when he chanced to notice a card in a shop window which was marked with big letters. Curiosity led him to pause and read the sign.

"What's this?" he murmured. "A large quantity of uncut diamonds on hand which will be cut in the best manner of the most skillful workmen?" I wonder if this interests me?"

There was no reason to suppose it did. Since the finding of the dead man other officers had made a tour of the diamond stores without learning that any suspicious stones had been bought. Still, Nathaniel had not been the one who made the tour, and suddenly turned and entered the shop.

A salesman gave prompt attention to him.

"What about these uncut diamonds?" he asked.

"They are fine specimens, and we can cut them to suit you, if you see fit to make arrangements."

"Have you had them long?"

"Only two or three days."

"Where did you get them?"

"They are from Africa, and of fine style and much promise."

Nathaniel was not satisfied, and he asked to see the proprietor. That gentleman came, and he at first claimed that the diamonds were a special consignment from Africa, but when the detective made his identity known, he hastened to put himself on the safe side.

"I bought them Monday evening of a man who came here in person," he explained.

"What sort of a man?"

"A lan!-built man, and very tall."

"Bearded?"

"No. He wore no whiskers at all. He was a very serious-looking person, and

had a show of unusual intelligence, but his face was like a blank sheet of paper—it was hard to read."

Nathaniel was gratified. The description fitted Jonathan Case well, and he made a note of it.

"Have not officers recently made a tour of the shops for diamonds of suspicious origin?" asked Nathaniel, with some sternness.

"Yes. They did not mention uncut diamonds, though."

"Then they failed in their duty."

"What! do you think these connected with the Hammond case?" demanded the dealer, frightened.

"As to that I cannot say. The tall man who sold them—was he well-dressed?"

"Tolerably," replied the dealer, showing some embarrassment.

The detective felt that his companion was not above suspicion, but he let it go at that. Just then it was enough for him that the seller had not been well-dressed; Jonathan Case was not.

Some further questions Nathaniel asked, and then he left the shop.

"It is getting warm for the plotters," he mused. "There is no doubt in my mind that it was Case who sold these diamonds. He did it the evening of Hammond's disappearance, too. That is striking. When I see fit I will have the dealer around to identify Jonathan. I do not envy the man of science his position just now. He is liable to get into trouble."

The detective was moving away briskly when he chanced to notice a familiar figure. Just ahead of him Jonathan Case was striding like a military man in haste, and the circumstance was impressive.

Why was he near at that moment? Why was he in the Bowery, anyhow?

Two ideas came to Nathaniel. Either the scientist was watching him, or Case had come there to sell more diamonds, and had been scared off by the sight of the detective in the shop.

"He's seen me, anyhow, and I reckon I'll keep an eye on him. He has turned into the side street. Well, I'll do the same."

He carried out the idea, but when he passed the corner he came to a full stop. His man was not visible.

The professor had gone out of sight completely.

Nathaniel was bewildered for a moment. It was hard to understand how a man could take himself out of sight so expeditiously, but it was easy enough if he had friends near, and a house to which he could go.

The detective lingered long on the corner, but nothing came of it.

The scientist did not reappear.

The watch was abandoned after awhile. Nathaniel was weary, and he wanted to get home and go to bed. Even if he saw the professor again it was not likely anything would come of it. He would probably go directly home. If he did not, the officer did not want to arrest him then, or to make himself too conspicuous in his warfare.

Accordingly, Nathaniel betook himself to his own quarters. When he entered the room he had a surprise—Barlow Craig was there.

This was singular in itself, but first glance told more. One look was enough to show that something was wrong—radically wrong.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE WORK OF THE SHADOWY DANGER.

Barlow Craig was not himself. His face was flushed like that of a man in a fever, and his eyes had a wild glare. He rose at Nathaniel's entrance, and if the detective had not known him so well he might have been troubled at being alone with one who looked as he did. Barlow was silent, and it was Nathaniel who broke the pause.

"What's the matter with you?" he inquired, abruptly.

Craig trembled perceptibly.

"What do you see that's wrong?" he asked, in a rumbling voice.

"You are not in good trim."

"How do you know it?"

"Your looks. You are not a hard drinker, yet a man with delirium tremens might appear as you do now."

"I am mad, burnt up by fever; seethin' with somethin' or other."

"You are ill, my man. You need a doctor. I'll call one for you."

"Wait!" rumbled Barlow. "I want ter talk with ye. Sit down!"

He dropped into a chair himself, and then pressed both hands to his head. Nathaniel watched him closely. Clearly he was a sick man, but the officer was not able to diagnose his ailment.

Presently Barlow removed his hands and looked at his companion with blood-shot eyes.

"There's a pain in my head that is tearin' me all up," he grated, "an' my blood is on fire. Don't talk o' doctors; I have a word ter say with you. I got this queer."

"You know the cause of it, then?"

"It was the work of a devil!" cried the burly visitor. "They did the work, an' I suffer from it—suffer the pangs of the lost. I know how I got it, but I don't understand it at all. It is mysterious; yes, an' it's awful!"

The burly visitor shook like a leaf, and there could be no question that the trouble was most serious. The detective sat down by him and tried to pacify him.

"Control yourself for awhile," he soothingly urged, "and then we will see that you are properly treated. First of all, tell me what the trouble is."

"Tis the work of devils!" persisted Barlow. "They come an' took me unawares, an' they hev killed me!"

"Who?"

"The fellers in masks!—the ones that drove the poison inter my arm!"

"What?" cried Nathaniel, excitedly.

"A gang took me off my guard, an' they got the best o' me, an' they jabbed some devil's instrument inter my arm an' let the poison inter my veins!"

Nathaniel Rand was speechless. He was quick to catch the import of the reply, and the deduction was plain. The shadowy danger had struck at somebody besides himself.

When he could command himself he again urged Barlow to tell his story, and the man rallied and complied.

"It all happened in my room," he explained. "I was asleep there, along about three o'clock this mornin', I reckon, when the trouble come. It got there unbeknown ter me; I woke up ter find myself in the grip of hostile hands."

"I've seen my share o' fightin', an' I ain't no coward, so I fit them bravely enough, but the odds was too much. They overpowered me an' tied me up strong, hand an' foot."

"There was three o' them. They was masked so I couldn't tell anything about how they looked; they may have been white or black, red or yeller; I don't know how it was."

"That's all I saw. They bandaged my eyes, an' that shut out all view, of course. After that they fussed around the room fer awhile, an' then the strange part of it begun."

"They pushed back my sleeve, barin' my arm ter the shoulder. I couldn't understand this, but they developed the plot fast enough fer all purposes."

"Before long they took a hard grip on my arm, holdin' it fast, an' then I felt a prickin' sensation in my arm. I struggled ter get it loose, but, of course, they jest held it fast."

"Some sort of a sharp instrument was jabbed clear inter the flesh, an' then—say, it was awful! A streak o' fire seemed ter shoot through my blood."

Nathaniel had been listening breathlessly. He now exclaimed:

"And then?—and then?"

"They kept a-hold o' me, an' they had need ter. Fire? I should say so. They had injected somethin' inter my veins,

and it seethed like lava. Hot ain't no name fer it—it was jest burnin' my blood an' makin my flesh a livin' coal!"

Barlow Craig, mass of bone and muscle that he was, paused and shook like an aspen. He was such a terrible picture of strong manhood brought to wreck that Nathaniel was almost overpowered with emotion. He could see what he would have been had he not been saved from the masked men by the overruling power of Providence and the timely aid of the mysterious rescuers.

When Barlow had regained a measure of composure he went on:

"That was the way fer half an hour, or so, an' then the pain and fire subsided. It died out fast when it started, and I was so much easier that I stopped strugglin'.

"Probably they had been waitin' fer that, fer they soon let go of my arm. There was some hustlin' about in the room, an' then I heard them go out by the winder. Utter silence follered.

"They was gone, but they left me bound, an' try all I would, I couldn't get loose. I was gagged, too, an' I couldn't sound a cry, so I lay there fer hours as I was. The pain did not come back as it was at first, but the fire did not die out o' my blood; I was in a reg'lar fever, an' my veins was pipes fer runnin' lava, it seemed.

"There was no relief until ten o'clock this mornin', and then the folks o' the house come ter see what had become o' me. Of course they let me loose, an' then I had chance ter act.

"First thing I dranked a pailful o' water, but it didn't do no good. The fever kept up, an' I was in torment. I tore about my room at times, an' then lay on the bed, burnin' up. It was a wretched day, now you kin bet.

"I've stood it all along as well as I could, but now I've come ter you fer help an' advice. I need it. What has been done ter me?"

Barlow Craig looked at Nathaniel anxiously. He was worried and ill, and his eyes had the wild gleam still in them.

"What do you think they injected into your arm?" the detective asked.

"Some liquid. It was runnin' fire."

"And the men—who do you think they were?"

"I don't know."

"What were they like?"

"I can't tell you nothin' except that one was very tall; he seemed ter be the leader. I can't remember more. Fact is, my head is in an awful state. I reckon I'm growin' crazy!"

His eyes bore witness to the possibility, and Nathaniel felt the need of prompt action.

"You must have a doctor," he urged.

"No. I don't want one; they are no good."

"But something must be done for you."

"Somethin' has been done, an' that's what is the trouble. I am growin' crazy! I feel it all through me. My head is on fire, an' it goes round an' round."

Barlow rose and stood glaring at the detective. Mixed with the wild glitter of his eyes was now a cunning, dangerous gleam.

"Who did this?" he continued, rumbly. "Mebbe it was you. I ain't known you long; how do I know you wasn't inter this plot against me?"

He suddenly reached out and seized hold of Nathaniel.

"I see it all now!" he added, wildly. "You've done this, an' you hev killed me. Ha! I won't die alone. I'll kill you, too—I will!"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE TOUCH OF THE DESTROYER.

The detective realized that Barlow Craig was a dangerous man just then. It was no figure of speech when he said he was growing crazy. Madness was upon him, and he was not responsible for his delusions. It was not strange that he saw fit to regard Nathaniel as an enemy.

The latter saw the need of skillful

action, and he rallied to meet the emergency. He did not seek to break Barlow's grasp, but looked squarely in the eyes.

"Now, my man," he coolly responded, "you know this is all nonsense. Where will you find a better friend than I am? Haven't we been partners, and moved by a common spirit?"

"That don't prevent your turnin' against me now," doggedly replied the afflicted man.

"Why should I? What motive can I have? Come, Barlow, be reasonable. You are in trouble, and you need help. I am anxious to help you."

Craig hesitated. His wild eyes softened, and, after a pause, he released his hold.

"Mebbe you are right," he muttered.

"Trust me, and I will do all that good will, medicine and skill can do for you. I will save you."

"Do it—do it!" exclaimed the visitor.

"First of all, lie down on my bed. I want to see this arm of yours. I want to see what sort of work they have done."

Barlow had suddenly become as passive as a child. He lay down, and then looked at Nathaniel with eyes like those of an animal in distress. The orbs had softened and become full of entreaty.

"Help me ef you can!" he implored.

Nathaniel bared the arm. Near the shoulder he saw a small break—a deep red, and all around it the flesh was of unnatural color. It was inflammation, and reminded him, on the whole, of the marks of vaccination.

As far as he could see the inflammation, in itself, was not likely to do serious harm, but it was all through his blood, and the result was doubtful.

Barlow was still averse to having a doctor, but the detective argued with him until he yielded.

Nathaniel called in a fellow-lodger, and the latter was duly despatched for the doctor. The latter came, saw the patient, made a full examination and heard the story from Craig.

Plainly, it staggered his powers of credence, but, when he glanced at the detective, he had mute corroboration of Barlow's story. When it was told he took Nathaniel aside.

"What is this strange tale?" he asked.

"I do not fully understand it."

"Do you believe anything of the sort has happened?"

"I believe it fully."

"Then it is the most remarkable thing I ever heard of."

"Allow me to ask a question," answered Nathaniel. "What has been injected into his arm?"

"I don't know," admitted the doctor.

"Is there no drug that would produce such results?"

"There are plenty of drugs that would produce the conditions visible to the inexperienced eye, but, to a physician, there are signs connected with the case that I utterly fail to understand. I don't know what was injected hypodermically."

"What could be the object?"

"Done as it was, it is impossible to say."

"Could it have been a blow aimed at Craig's life?"

"Possibly."

"Or mere experiment?"

"One thing is as possible as another in this case."

"Suppose that a man wanted to kill another, and yet do it secretly, could he hope to succeed by this device?"

"Without knowing what the stuff was I could not say. Speaking off-hand, however, my reply would be, yes."

"Do you think that if this stuff was applied outwardly it would burn and disfigure the skin, and remove hair and cuticle?"

The doctor shook his head.

"To answer this would be to go wholly into the realm of mere suspicion. It would be idle for me to guess."

"In any case, it would be a good, safe way to remove an enemy?"

"Maybe so."

Plainly, the doctor had tired of useless surmising, and the detective pressed him no further.

"The place for this man," the physician remarked, presently, "is in a hospital. I might treat him by myself, and seek to gain some renown over a mysterious case, but humanity demands that he go where he can get the best of treatment. Insanity threatens him. Unless he is handled quickly and well, he will be a maniac inside of a few days!"

Nathaniel looked at the speaker deeply excited.

"And is this," he replied, "the result of the successful application of the shadowy danger?"

"Of the—what?" asked the doctor, puzzled.

"Excuse me; I mean of the hypodermic injection."

"This is the result. Fever, madness, mental wreck."

"And this," thought Nathaniel, "is what I have escaped by so narrow a margin. Truly, the mysterious letter warned me well when it said the danger was of a sort of which I never had heard!"

The detective's thoughts turned to his two rescues. Who had given him such timely, yet puzzling relief? Who had thus saved his life? What had been the object of the rescuers? Why had they so persistently kept their identity secret?

The voice of the doctor aroused Nathaniel, and they bestirred themselves and made ready to get Barlow Craig to the hospital. He no longer objected, and was generally quiet, though an occasional change of manner occurred, and he waxed savage and dangerous.

These periods, the doctor prophesied, would grow upon him until reason utterly departed, unless something could be found to counteract the unknown drug that was eating his life away.

In due time an ambulance came, and Barlow was taken away. He did not need to go alone. Nathaniel kept him company, and, at the hospital, gave special directions to have him well cared for.

Stating that the police were interested, he urged that all that was possible be done to save his reason and life.

After that Nathaniel went home. He was too thoroughly wearied out to dwell even upon the shadowy danger, and he fell asleep quickly and rested peacefully until morning.

While he ate breakfast he meditated. By the time he had finished eating he had his plan matured, and he did not let any time go to waste.

Leaving the house he walked off briskly.

His course was toward Doomsday Den, but he was still short of the block itself, when he chanced to observe Patrick Henry High just ahead of him. It was one of the things he had in view to interview the none-too-strong-minded negro, and he proceeded to overtake him.

Patrick Henry's eyes beamed with pleasure on being accosted.

"Why, Mr. Rand, sir, how do you do?" he replied. "I am delighted to see you, an' I hope you are enjoying transcendental health, sir."

"You name it well, Mr. High. And how are you?"

"I am in a state of beatificude, sir."

"You look it, Mr. High."

"The philosophers, they argue on wedder life is worth living. I, sir, find life a jocose vivacity, and wholly free from pessimistic hyperchondriacs."

Patrick Henry braced himself stoutly as he rolled off these long words, and got through with them safely.

"It is a big thing to be happy and contented," replied Nathaniel, "but I fancy yours is a happy household, isn't it?"

"I reckon so, sir."

"Free from care and given to unalloyed gayety, eh?"

"We-e-ell, I dunno as to that," answered Patrick Henry, rather doubtfully. "Sometimes I rather think I am the only really blissful person there."

"Really?"

"Yes. Mrs. Hannah, she hangs ter her room and falls into sort of abstractions, or wanders around like a ghost. She ain't much of a talker, sir; indeed, and she isn't. Her mind is not just amplitudinous, I reckon. I've a notion that she may have taken too many of the professor's drugs—I know he experiments on her."

"Possible?"

"Yes. Then there is Mr. Gabriel Redaxe. Say, hasn't he got a brain, though! And a will like an ox! But he's an old man, and blind, so there he sits, day in and day out, and just thinks, thinks, thinks!—and his staff goes thump, thump, thump! on the floor. He's a remarkable man, he is."

"Then there is Professor Case," suggested Nathaniel, seductively.

Patrick Henry had been serious, but he now broke into a laugh.

"He, he! The professor, he's all bound up in science, but I don't know wedder to take him as a fact or a joke. His whole life is bound up in the Oil of Hygeia."

"Mr. High, what is that Oil of Hygeia?"

"Oh! it's something that is going to cure the whole world—when he gets it done. It will be great—when it's done!"

"You really interest me. Mr. High, kindly explain just what this article is. I am interested."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE CALL ON GABRIEL REDAXE.

Patrick Henry applied his fingers to his wool and stirred up hair and ideas in a puzzled way.

"The Oil of Hygeia, eh?" he replied. "Well, sah, I can't exactly tell you what that thing is. Professor Case has been working on it for twenty years, his wife says. When it's done it is to cure all complaints that man is heirsch to. But he can't get it just right. He adds this drug and takes out that, day by day, but it don't meet requirements, you see. He can't get the patent combination, I may say; so he works, works, works, and he's kept working for all the long years."

"A drug, is it?" answered Nathaniel. "How is it used?"

"It's a hopperdemocratic injection, sah—he uses it by interjecting it into folks' arms."

"A cure for all ills?"

"Yes."

"Has anybody been cured?"

"That I don't know. Last thing I heard he was still unsatisfied with the decoction."

"Of course it would not harm anybody?"

"Oh! no, sah."

"How do you know?"

"The profesor wouldn't harm nobody."

"Mr. High, you remember that Lucas Hammond who died, don't you?"

"Surely, sah."

"Pity Professor Case could not have saved him."

"Yes, sah."

"Would the Oil of Hygeia have done it?"

"Well, speaking off-hand and super-deliberatively, I don't think it would!"

"Of course Mr. Case did not try it on him?"

"No. I saw plenty of Lucas Hammond, and he wasn't the man to let experiments be made on him—not much! He was a bluff, practical man, and he had muscle like a bear. No, sah, the professor, he never got no chance to experiment on Hammond, you bet!"

"Nathaniel looked disappointed, but he hung grimly to his purpose.

"Do you ever help Mr. Case with his drugs?"

"No."

"I should think he would have explosions of his chemicals, now and then."

"No, he don't. He's too good a chemist for that."

"You would have known if he had met with such an explosion, would you?"

"Yes, sah. I clean up his laboratory every day."

The detective was annoyed. Information was not coming to suit him, and it was not pleasant. Still, he had been making several inquiries on the blindest of guesses, and he really was not surprised.

He persevered for awhile longer, but Patrick Henry told nothing more that was of value. Nathaniel turned his questions to everyday matters. Learning that Patrick Henry had been on a household errand, and was then homeward bound, he said he would go along to the house.

He went, and then, at his request, the servant looked for his master. The professor was not in, so the detective sent his name to Gabriel Redaxe. This time he was more successful. Gabriel never was out, and, as usual, he was ready to see the caller.

He greeted Nathaniel with his usual abruptness, not waiting for a word from the applicant.

"Well, young man, how goes your case?" he demanded.

"The mystery is still unsolved, sir," Nathaniel answered.

"Bad, bad!"

"Can you give me any suggestions, sir?"

The veteran's staff descended with two sharp thumps.

"Why, sir; why, sir, I have retired," he reminded.

"Your skill and intuitions remain."

"Do you see my head, crowned with hair as white as snow? Do you see the weight of seventy-eight years on my shoulders? Do you see my sightless eyes? I am a crippled ox; no more."

"I am not oblivious to your age, sir; but I can see just as clearly that your mind is as active as ever."

Gabriel was not so imperious and harsh as usual, and something like a ray of pleasure flitted across his rugged face.

"So, so, so!" he murmured, tapping the floor gently with his staff.

"When you were in active service you were the greatest detective in New York. I should esteem it a favor to learn of you, and to profit by your advice and wisdom."

Gabriel sighed slightly.

"The human brain rusts with disuse," he remarked. "I have not been outside this house in three years, and my association with the world has been limited to breathing. When a man goes on the shelf as much as that he rusts, rusts!"

Down came the staff with a tremendous thump.

"In a measure you are right, but I will answer for your ability. It has not lessened."

"Huff, huff, huff!"

The old, non-committal exhalation of breath was very natural, but it was followed by a direct question.

"Have you no clew, young man?"

"What I have learned is in the way of theories, I may say."

"Do you remember I told you a detective must have inspiration and intuition?"

"Yes, sir."

"Cultivate them! It's the only way to succeed in your business."

"Hard work and perseverance often accomplish much. Now, there is Professor Case. I have heard that he has been at work many years on a compound called the Oil of Hygeia, seeking to perfect it. He uses work, hard toil. By the way, Mr. Redaxe, what is the Oil of Hygeia?"

The veteran was briefly silent. He beat an almost inaudible tattoo on the floor with his foot.

"Professor Case," he finally replied, with unusual deliberation, "is, I believe, at work on the article named. It is a beloved subject with him. He wishes to make a great achievement. I am not able to say what elements enter into the composition of the Oil of Hygeia."

"Has he cured anybody with it?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Is there anything about it that is dangerous to mankind?"

"The professor has not so informed me."

Nathaniel had been studying the powerful face before him attentively. He might as well have tried to read thoughts in a rock, but the absence of severity on Mr. Redaxe's part emboldened him. He suddenly leaned forward and spoke excitedly, yet in a subdued voice:

"Sir, if you can tell me anything of that compound I beg of you to do it. Is it an agent for good or evil?"

If Nathaniel was excited, his companion gave no sign of being in like mood. Mr. Redaxe's face was calm, and his sightless eyes were directed toward the younger man steadily.

"When I was a detective," he answered, quietly, "I found it a wise plan to doubt everything until I had proved it worthy of confidence."

"I doubt the Oil of Hygeia."

"Why?"

"I believe it has done harm."

"Then apply my rule, young man!"

"Tell me of this vile compound. What are its means of ruin? Why does it blast and destroy? Why need life and reason be sacrificed to cater to the ambition of another man?"

Eagerly Nathaniel sought his answer both by speech of his companion and from his wonderful face.

"I do not know its elements. Neither do I know any point where the ambition of a scientist stops. If you doubt this compound, why not seek to know more of it?"

"If you would tell me—if you would advise me—"

Nathaniel was all eagerness, but he was roughly interrupted by the veteran.

"Quite right, young man; quite right! You do well to come here to report. Still, we cannot help you. At least, I cannot, and I think I may say the same of Professor Case. He has weightier subjects on his mind. A man who stands high in science—my cousin, sir!—and looked up to by all the world. There is no doubt as to his position; his standing is assured. Still, he and I cannot be bothered to find suggestions for you!"

Mr. Redaxe had grown harsh and rude, and Nathaniel's face fell. The change was so sudden as to confuse him. Gabriel went on sternly:

"One thing more, sir! Of course the man was killed by the wretch now in prison—Bowen? is that his name?—and the whole city admits it—but we have been mentioned as friends of Hammond. Put a stop to that! Of course you are not to blame, but you can direct public opinion. Do so now! Keep our names out of the newspapers. This is an honorable family, sir, and my cousin, the professor, is very eminent in his profession. Squelch the papers, I tell you!"

Nathaniel gazed in bewilderment. Gabriel was more than harsh.

Thump, thump, thump! went the staff on the floor.

"Do you hear, sir?" added the veteran.

"I do, sir."

"Am I not right?"

"Perhaps."

"I am. Obey me, and all will be well."

"For whom?"

"Everybody!"

Redaxe again pounded the floor; then he suddenly shifted his position and more mildly added:

"Still, as I said before, you do well to report here."

"I am glad you approve of that," dryly returned Nathaniel.

"Of course it is bad news to learn that you have made no discoveries, but what's the need? Bowen was found on the spot. Hang Bowen! Electrocute him!"

"We will see."

"I have been a detective. When I was on the force of my intuitions never failed, and it is so now. I tell you, electrocute Bowen!"

"It takes a judge and jury to do that."

"Huff, huff!"

Just as the veteran thus expelled his breath there was a slight creaking sound behind Nathaniel. The door opened and Jonathan Case deliberately walked in. He paused briefly; then looked at the caller and politely spoke:

"Oh! is it you, Mr. Rand?"

The detective was quick to assume an air which would tell nothing.

"Is it I, professor?"

"I thought Mr. Redaxe was alone."

"No apologies, cousin," responded the veteran. "Rand is here to see you or me; I have not found out which. He is vague, very vague for a detective."

"Works tell, not theories," replied Mr. Case. "How goes your work, Rand?"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE CLAM-BIRD'S TRAIL.

The detective was looking at Jonathan Case with interest never before felt. Unless he erred the man was a thief and—far worse! Clear as his suspicions were in some directions he could not grasp it all, but he knew enough to regard him with a sort of wonder that a man could attain such unenviable positions.

The professor had never been more himself in outward appearance. His leathery face was as serene as ever, and he seemed utterly undisturbed. All this, Nathaniel Rand thought, only proved his remarkable depth of character, and made him the more dangerous to deal with.

To the last question he managed to answer calmly and naturally:

"There is but little to report, Mr. Case."

"Basil Bowen is still in confinement?"

"Oh! most certainly."

"It was well he was seized in the act."

"The coming of the patrolman on that occasion was timely."

"I have given this matter some thought," pursued Mr. Case, "and it seems to me that Bowen may have had a regular gang back of him. If Lucas Hammond had diamonds, they were not found on him or Bowen. Is it not likely he had aids, and that they carried off the diamonds?"

"I have thought of that, professor."

"It does credit to your acumen—much credit. You are young, but I infer that you are quite worthy of the trust of such a large case."

The professor looked very benevolent then, and once more Nathaniel was impressed with the fact that he was a deep man. In one respect his depth was thrown away; the very transparent device of seeking to fix suspicion fully upon Basil Bowen was a loss of breath.

Nathaniel had been anxious to see the man again and study him while they talked. He had full opportunity to talk, for Jonathan appeared quite willing, but it was as useless to study him as if they had been a mile apart. Like Gabriel Redaxe, he was unreadable.

Half an hour passed, and then the detective rose to go. He had made his call seem natural by his conversation, and he had been well treated. Mr. Case was polite to the end, and would have gone down to the door to see the caller out had not Nathaniel assured him it was unnecessary. He went down alone.

In the lower hall he happened upon the professor's wife.

Hannah Case was passing by on some trivial errand, it seemed. She looked at Nathaniel, but there was no interest or recognition in the regard.

Again the detective was impressed by her strange face. The remarkable pallor; the utter lack of expression, and the listlessness of her manner were alike impressive.

"Death in life!" thought the caller, as he passed out.

The visit had not been wholly satisfactory. Jonathan Case had been a riddle, and no advance had been made on the case.

Presently Nathaniel's thoughts turned to Gabriel Redaxe.

"Remarkable man!" he murmured. "His mind is a power still. I never have seen such a striking figure before. Old age has taken no degree of strength from his mental make-up, and he could still wage a deadly war on criminals, if he had his sight. But how am I to account for his peculiar course toward me? He was very civil—almost friendly—one mo-

ment; and then he fell suddenly into his old, harsh way. Perhaps it was just as well, for Professor Case soon came—"

Nathaniel stopped short in the street.

A suspicion had come to him like a flash.

Deeply was he buried in thought for a few moments; then his face cleared.

"Upon my word!" he exclaimed, "I believe I have solved it!"

In silence his meditations went on.

"It always has been so. Mr. Redaxe has been civil and harsh by turns. Has not the harshness always followed the civility? I believe it has, and this I do know—whenever he has been especially severe to me, Professor Case has immediately entered the room. Three times that has happened. Now, is not Redaxe a better friend than he seems, and does he not get harsh when Case is near? The blind have remarkable powers of hearing. Does Redaxe hear Case outside the door, and then promptly change from politeness to severity?"

The suspicion was too great to be abandoned quickly, and Nathaniel's mind dwelt upon it long and eagerly.

He had only added to his admiration for Gabriel Redaxe by seeing him in person. It would be a great thing to know that the veteran sympathized with him.

But that called for want of sympathy with Jonathan Case.

Was it possible that the retired master was not devoted to his "cousin," of whom he spoke so highly?

"I must think this over further," decided the detective. "Just now I have something more to do than to meditate, and I must be about it."

Walking briskly the detective approached the neighborhood where Tom Brown, the clam-bird, lived. He had business to transact with that person, and it must not be delayed.

When he neared the house itself, he saw a man leaning against a lamp-post with an air of seeming carelessness, smoking serenely. It was the companion detective who had before helped him, and Nathaniel accosted him with the manner of one speaking to a stranger, though he really came directly to the point.

"What news, Barnes?"

"Nothing," was the answer.

"No sign of the clam-bird?"

"None."

"Can it be he is still in his room?"

"All I know is that he has not passed out. I was here very early, and I have watched sharply. Tom Brown has not appeared."

"I will go and call for him. Do you stay here; I may have more for you to do."

He went on to the house. The people there were rough and evil of face, and he could easily believe that he would find little favor in their eyes if they knew he was an officer. He inquired for Tom Brown, and was directed to his room.

Nathaniel went up. Reaching the place he knocked on the door. He had no reply, so, when a second application met with the same result, he opened the door.

A mean, dirty but half-furnished room was revealed to his gaze, but it had no occupant. The rather decent bed was as smooth as if it never had been used, and Nathaniel had an idea.

He turned back and knocked at the door next along the hall. A woman answered the summons.

"Where is Tom Brown?" bluffly asked the detective.

"I don't know."

"Who can tell me?"

"I can tell as much as anybody," she replied. "I take care of his room—he ain't got no relatives—an' so I know as much as anybody but Tom. He ain't been in since yesterday."

"Wasn't he here last night?"

"No. He didn't come home at all. Mebbe he has gone out of town. He told me yesterday that he might go away for awhile—he didn't say where—an' I guess he went."

"I should like to see him."

"All you've got ter do is ter find him. I don't know where he is. Tom has ructions with the police now an' then, an' mebbe it is so now. Anyhow, he's not in, an' hasn't been in since yesterday."

Nathaniel asked but little more. He descended the stairs and took his way to the street. There he rejoined Barnes.

"The clam-bird is said to have taken wings. It may be a trick, or the truth—I believe it is true. Linger here, Barnes, and keep up watch. I'll see you in a couple hours again."

Nathaniel walked on. He was in deep thought, and went five blocks in this mood. Then he had a rude awakening. One moment all was peaceful around him; the next, some unseen power seized him, and he was hurled violently into space. Helpless, he went to his fate.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MYSTERIOUSLY SAVED.

It was not a moment for intricate analysis, but Nathaniel Rand had been able to understand much that occurred. First of all he felt the touch of a rough hand on his collar—that was real enough. Then the same power hurled him aside. Taken wholly unawares, and moved on with almost incredible swiftness, he was wholly unable to check his impetus.

Several feet he went, and then fell heavily. At the same moment he was bewildered by the sound of a tremendous shock, or report of some sort, and when he blindly struggled to rise he found the air full of particles of something that sifted into his throat and almost strangled him.

Helpless as he had been, he had done some quick thinking, and one idea was uppermost.

"This is another attack of the shadowy foe!"

He rose to his feet. All of his limbs performed their wonted functions, and he was conscious of great relief to learn that he was not badly injured. Coughing violently, he essayed to brush his eyes clear of the dust that filled them.

Gradually all these obstructions subsided, and he gained clear view of the cause of all this difficulty.

All around, the sidewalk was littered with pieces of stone, some of infinitesimal size, and with all intermediate sizes up to fragments as large as his head. These bits, with the dust consequent thereto, cumbered the sidewalk wholly.

Getting a sudden idea, the detective looked up. The building by which all this had occurred was five stories in height, and, to make it more impressive and ornamental, the builder had arranged a line of fancifully cut stones along the verge of the roof.

These were all in place but one. That one, a block weighing some hundred pounds, had fallen and broken into countless pieces on the sidewalk.

All this Nathaniel saw, and then more flashed upon him.

The stone had fallen exactly where he had been an instant before.

He had been unconscious of danger, and, if he had been left to his own government, he would have been crushed under the block of stone.

At the critical moment some person had seized him and hurled him violently aside, out of the path of the stone.

That person had saved his life.

Who was it?

He looked about with eagerness and gratitude in his mind. Men were gathering around the spot, and he had plenty of friendly sympathizers among them. One gave him a helping hand.

"Are you much hurt, mister?" he asked.

"Not a bit," Nathaniel replied.

"Didn't that rock hit you?"

"No. I was just saved from it. Somebody detected the danger and hurled me out of its way. Gentlemen," he added, looking at the crowd, "which one of you have I to thank?"

Absolute silence followed the question.

"I say, which one of you pushed me out of the way of the stone?"

"I didn't," replied one.

"Nor I," added others, in chorus.

Nathaniel was surprised. Men who do timely acts were not usually reluctant to admit their share and claim credit. Why did not this man speak out. Of course, it seemed that he must be of the group still there.

"A builder who will put up such a stone on a dizzy point of the roof, and not properly secure it, ought to be shot!" declared an old man. "Why, that building ain't a year old, and now down comes the stone a-tumblin'. Must have been mighty shabby work done up there. Say, mister, ef you hadn't got out o' the way that rock would just have ground you into a shapeless mass."

"True," admitted the detective, "and I want to thank the man who saved me."

Again a silence. No one spoke up to claim credit.

"Better look for the man who left an edge-stone so insecure," suggested a bystander.

At that juncture the shrill voice of a boy piped out from the verge of the crowd:

"I don't believe that ere was an accident!"

"Why not?" demanded Nathaniel.

"I seen some men up there with a crowbar, workin' away on that very stone. They seemed to be proppin' it up close to the edge o' the roof. I thought it was funny, then."

Certain possibilities were abruptly suggested to Nathaniel, and he determined to act at once.

"Men," he cried, "I want two or three of you to follow me. I am going up on that roof and look into this."

There were recruits enough who offered their services, and, as the people of the building did not object, the investigators were soon on the roof. There they found only a crowbar and a few small, loose stones, but the mute evidence was enough to convince all.

Men had been there, lifted the now broken stone to a desired position, and left it poised so that the slightest touch would send it falling to the street.

All had been done by design.

Nathaniel looked into it further. He soon satisfied himself that none of the inmates of the building had been in the plot. Some of the neighbors had seen the men who had operated on the roof.

"The leader of them," explained one, "was a short, stout man in rough clothes. He had a very red face, but it was red in two different shades—sort of dappled."

The detective needed no more explanation. The description fitted accurately to Tom Brown, the clam-bird.

Close search failed to develop the scoundrel, and it was evident that he had made good his escape.

"One thing more," exclaimed Nathaniel, when again on the street with the crowd that still lingered. "I want to know who gave me a helping hand. He foresaw the danger; I did not. By flinging me out of the way he saved my life. I want to thank him. Which one of you was it?"

"Why, mister," piped the boy before mentioned. "it was the drunken man that yanked you off yer pins!"

The detective turned sharply upon the boy.

"What's that?" he demanded.

"It was the man who was just behind you that did it."

"A drunken man?"

"Yes. When you come down the street there was a man just behind you, all the way, that staggered and lurched around dreadful. Jest as you got by this buildin' he looked up an' seen the stone comin' down. I guess it scared the drunk out o' him, fer he jumped toward you like a tiger, grabbed you by the collar, and jerked you ter on' side like a flash. It was him that saved yer life!"

Nathaniel drank in every word eagerly.

"Where is this man now?" he demanded, looking the crowd over again.

"Oh! he's gone. He dodged the stone

like a gymnastic chap, an' then took a look at you. Seemed as if he was makin' sure you was all right. He seen you gettin' up, an' then the way he hustled off was a caution. He disappeared down the block."

"Drunk, was he?"

"Well, yes. He seemed to be, anyways. But the danger must have scared the drunk all out o' him."

"What did he look like?"

"Well, he had shaggy hair, an' was pretty much like a tramp. Yes, an' he had on a long coat, like an overcoat."

Nathaniel gazed at the speaker in bewilderment. The boy had given a good description of Diogenes Walker.

"This man—he saved me?" uttered the detective.

"Yes."

"Why should he do it?"

The last question was not asked because an answer was expected; it simply was that Nathaniel was amazed. He had been looking upon Diogenes Walker as an implacable enemy. Now, the man had saved his life. It was almost past belief, but the evidence all pointed that way.

In one respect the detective felt that he had made no mistake—Diogenes was not what he seemed to be. His drunkenness was assumed, and he was a clear-headed and powerful man, who could act on occasion with zeal and certainty.

There was nothing more to be gained from the crowd, so the officer went to his fellow-detective, reported the latest developments, and bade him redouble his vigilance in searching for Tom Brown, the clam-bird.

The vindictive and determined nature of the man was more than ever visible. He had suspected that Nathaniel would seek him in his home, and that his course would be through the street where his trap had been laid. Thus, the chance to use the falling stone was not a mere possibility; it was almost a certainty.

Nathaniel retraced his steps more puzzled than ever.

"What am I to think of Diogenes Walker? It has been proved that, when occasion requires, he can throw off his appearance of drunkenness and act with tremendous celerity and muscle. He is not what he seems. He has always been near where I have met the shadowy danger. Now, if he is not a foe, he must be—can I believe it?—can I believe he is a friend?"

The detective shook his head.

"A friend? That is too much for my credence. It is impossible!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

A NOTE OF GREAT ALARM.

By this time Nathaniel had reached the crowd that still lingered where the stone had fallen. News had spread that it had been thrown down intentionally, but, as the detective had not betrayed the fact that he knew the attack was aimed directly at him, there was not the amount of excitement that would have prevailed had this been known to them.

He lingered among them briefly, and was then passing along when he saw a familiar face on the verge of the crowd. It was that of John White, the man of abiding melancholy, and Nathaniel hastened to accost him.

"Hallo, Mr. White! Seeing the sights?"

"I am out trying to walk off my gloom," he lugubriously answered.

"Feeling down-hearted, are you?"

"I always am. Remorse, sir, remorse."

"Cast it off, White! Cast it off! Rally your will to do it."

"I am not in mental or physical condition to do that, sir. The fact is, something happened, a few years ago, that almost took my life. It did take a good part of it, and about all of my mental strength."

"Sickness?"

"It was like this: There was a man who feared me. He had reason to think that I might tell certain things that would injure him—though common sense should have told him I would not. It

would have done me as much harm as him.

"We were on friendly terms, or so I supposed. One day he came to me with a novel proposition.

"Just then there was a smallpox scare. This man I speak of was a scientific man, and high up in his calling—a great chemist—used to lecture in colleges, and all that sort of thing. He referred to the reign of smallpox, and asked me if I had been vaccinated lately.

"I told him I had not in twenty years. Then he urged me to let him vaccinate me. Well, he was so eminent in his calling that I agreed, not suspecting danger. Ugh! little did I know what was coming!

"He had a regular outfit, as far as I was able to tell, and he did the job. He used a hypodermic injection.

"Hardly had that been done when it seemed that my blood turned to fire. Intense heat shot all through me. It was pain of the worst kind, and there was a lively time in my room. He did all he could to quiet my distress, and, finally, the pain died away in a measure.

"After that he left me alone, but, presently, all the trouble returned. Fever flashed through my blood and madness came to my brain. I will not tire you with an account in detail, but this was the result: I went to a hospital and was there a long while, literally crazy, and desperately sick.

"Finally I recovered in a degree, but I was a wreck. My health was broken, and my mind was so weakened that I have never been myself since. You ask me to brace up. How can I? That accursed drug destroyed my mind; it made me dead in life!"

Nathaniel had listened with breathless attention.

"And did vaccination virus do all this?"

"Never!" declared White. "That was not used. It was some vile compound of the scientist's. Given to kill me! The man feared me."

"Why?"

"That I cannot explain."

"Have you never brought the man to task?"

"How can I? He is eminent, and, even if I accused him, he would explain it all away. He would succeed; I should fail."

"Mr. White, who was this man?"

"It would do you no good to know. I cannot tell you."

"Then I will name him. It was Professor Jonathan Case!"

John White opened his eyes in genuine surprise.

"You know all that?"

"Yes. Now, see here, White, you owe him no good will. Tell me all you know. You say this mysterious drug was given to kill you. Why should he so fear you? What secret of his did you hold?"

"I decline to say. It was as I've described about the drug, though. He has used it on others, too. He calls it the Oil of Hygeia. Oil of Health, indeed! It is an instrument of death! It seems he is trying to make it into a cure-all compound, but he has not succeeded. He experimented early on his own wife. She, too, was mad for a time, and when she recovered her mind was terribly weakened—the drug did it. He is sincere in his experiments, but when he gave it to me it was done to kill me. I know that!"

"Drug of ill omen!" murmured Nathaniel.

"Accursed drug!" added John White.

The detective had more to ask, and he proceeded to do it. He met with no new discovery. White was willing enough to talk of everything except the secret he had held over Jonathan Case.

"One thing I advise you," he added. "If you know the professor, look out for him! He will experiment on you, if he gets a chance, and that means death to you."

"But may he not have given up his belief in the Oil of Hygeia, and cast it overboard?"

"He never will, until he dies. I saw something only an hour or two ago that brought this vividly back to my mind. When I knew Case he had a female friend named Verona Trull. She, too, was a dabbler in science, or wanted to be. She was a mere counterfeit, but she had some money, and Case found it to his benefit to keep in with her. He was friends with all who had money. He got all of it he could—and soon sunk it in his experiments.

"To-day, as I stood on the next block, I saw a carriage go past. It had on the door a fanciful design made by entwining three roses of bright red with a curiously twisted vine. There is no other carriage in New York like it. I'll be sworn, and I knew it to be Verona Trull's.

"I looked; she was inside the vehicle. This was not all. With her was a young woman, as pretty and sweet and innocent to look at as Verona Trull was evil at heart—she was a fit companion for Case.

"They drove on and were lost to my sight. Afterward I wondered if it was well with the young lady. Was she safe with Verona, or was she in danger of being experimented on by Case and Miss Trull? Was she going to feel the touch of the Oil of Hygeia?

"This worries me a little, and if I had my usual health of body and mind I would go to Verona's home, at Number — Houston Street, and see if the young woman was in danger. But I am a wreck, a wreck!"

John White wound up with a deep sigh, and Nathaniel had to leave him to his sorrows. There did not seem to be anything more to be learned, and the talk about the two women in the carriage with the three red roses did not appear important.

Nathaniel said a few words to try and console the melancholy man, and then they parted.

The detective walked off in a thoughtful mood.

"Jonathan Case and his diabolical Oil of Health seem to have played an important part in the history of New York. Who knows the amount of damage he has done? The man is a veritable fiend!"

For several minutes the detective was abstracted, but, presently, he aroused. He had reached the house where Yettol Hammond lived, and, as he intended to call on her, his thoughts turned to that subject.

He ascended the stairs and knocked at her door.

There was no reply, and finally he turned and went to the rooms of her neighbor he had before interviewed. She promptly answered his knock.

"Oh! so it's you?" was her greeting.

"Yes, madam. I wanted to see Miss Yettol Hammond, but she does not seem to be in. Can you tell me where she is?"

The woman's face beamed with pleasure.

"She has gone out to work."

"When will she return?"

"Not for two or three days."

"That is bad."

"I call it good," declared the woman. "You see, she has got a much better customer than she is used to here. All of her sewing has been done for poor people, so, of course, she has got poor prices. Luck has come her way now, and she has a rich customer."

"Who? Where does she live?"

"I don't know that, though I think I heard Houston street mentioned. She came here with a carriage, and took Yettol right away with her. She wanted the work done right off. She must be very rich, for the carriage was just splendid. It was as slick as a baby's face, and grand, too. On the door of the carriage there was a pretty cluster of flowers, made by twining three red roses with green vines."

"What's that?" cried Nathaniel, sharply.

CHAPTER XXX.

A BOLD VENTURE.

The detective was startled. He had not forgotten his conversation with John White, and this story recalled it with vividness.

"I said," replied the woman, wonderingly, "that the carriage door was ornamented with three red roses entwined with a green leaf."

"And," excitedly questioned Nathaniel, "Yettol has gone away with that woman?"

"Yes."

"A stranger to her?"

"Yes, sir, but she was rich—"

"How did she happen to come here, anyhow?"

"I suppose she had heard that Yettol does nice work—"

"Do you think they went to Houston street?"

"I don't know. I heard it mentioned, and I supposed it was there the lady lived."

"Three red roses, you say, with a green vine entwined?"

"Yes. Is anything wrong, sir?"

"I don't know; I hope not."

Nathaniel did hope so, but John White's warning was very suggestive. According to his account the woman who owned the carriage with the red roses was a friend of Jonathan Case's, and White had expressed a fear which now beset the detective's mind with painful intensity.

Had Yettol gone to meet the shadowy danger?

Had the professor deemed her dangerous enough, or was his hatred or ambition keen enough so that he was eager to get her in his power, and experiment on her with the Oil of Hygeia?

Nathaniel Rand's blood boiled at the thought. It was bad enough to wreck men with the evil drug, but Yettol—

"I must save her from this terrible fate!" he thought, and turned abruptly away.

"Is anything wrong?" asked the neighbor again.

She had no answer. Nathaniel clattered down the stairs, and hastened to the street. He recognized the need of aid in this crisis, and hurried to where he had left his detective friend. The man was gone, and inquiry failed to develop any news of him.

"I shall have to try it alone," Nathaniel decided. "I remember the number given by John White, and I will go there at once. If the clew is perfect I may yet be able to save Yettol."

He started for Houston street, meditating on the woman of the three red roses and her kidnapped companion.

"The woman must be a fiend to lend herself to such a thing," he thought, "but there is no limit to the wickedness of anybody who would make friends with Professor Case. Poor Yettol! She has fallen into danger most terrible!"

He reached Houston street, found the proper house, and rang the bell. A colored woman answered the summons.

"Is Miss Trull in?" he asked.

"No, sah. She's gone for a ride," was the response.

"How long ago?"

"Much as four hours, I reckon. I dunno as she is coming home, to-day; don't look much like it."

"I want to see her carriage," pursued Nathaniel. "Where does she stable it?"

"Deed, sah, I don't know, but I think it's on this block, somewheres down east o' yere."

Nathaniel decided that Yettol was not in the house, and that Miss Trull was still absent. He asked some questions calculated to bring out information as to another resort of the Trull woman, if she had any, but met with no success.

He went away discouraged, but more than ever convinced of the truth of his fears. If Miss Trull had been honest in her alleged desire to have Yettol's services as a seamstress, and in haste,

they would have been at the house long before.

"The poor girl is marked for the Oil of Hygeia!" thought Nathaniel, with a shiver.

Could he ward off the danger? Where were they to be found?

He could think of but one thing to do, and that was to search for the stable where the carriage was kept.

He began the search.

Two stables he found and investigated, but nothing came of it. They had neither of them such a patron as Miss Verona Trull, nor any carriage with three red roses and a vine on the panel.

During his last conversation, however, a man stood near and listened with attention. When it was over and Nathaniel was turning away, he pressed forward.

"Did I hear you inquire for a carriage with three red roses on the door?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I saw such a one an hour ago, up on that way."

He pointed to the nearest cross-street.

"Is there a stable there?"

"No. It was standing in front of a house."

"What became of it?"

"I don't know. It disappeared, after awhile, but I did not see it go. I live near there."

"Who did you see with it?"

"The driver."

"Nobody else?"

"No. I suppose the folks were in Number Sixty-six."

"Who lives at that number?"

"Can't say. It was a family named Stebbins, until a few months ago. Then they moved out. There is a family there now, but none o' the neighbors has ever got acquainted with them."

"You say you live near there?"

"Yes, in the rear."

"My friend, will you receive me as your guest for a few hours?"

The detective displayed a five-dollar bill as he spoke, and the stranger's eyes gleamed with pleasure. He quickly agreed to the plan.

They walked off together. Nathaniel had a good view of Number Sixty-six as they went, but nothing was visible to do him any good. They passed through an alley and reached the home of the guide.

It was a humble place, a rather rickety house of wood; but it proved to be just what Nathaniel wanted.

It commanded a good view of the other house, and at one point approached it so that the windows were almost side by side, the rear house projecting a corner clean to the wall of the brick one in front.

Hans Bemis, the guide, conducted Nathaniel to the most desirable room and left him there.

The detective was ready for action, if need occurred. By stepping out on the roof of the extension, he could walk directly to the window of Sixty-six, and enter if the window was not fastened.

He settled down to watch.

Half an hour passed—an hour—another half hour.

Nathaniel had grown nervous. Inaction palled upon him. He was learning nothing, and time was being used that might be needed elsewhere. He grew impatient.

"This must end," he decided. "I can waste no more time here. It must be go to duty elsewhere, or—make a bold move here."

He was considering a risky device—risky because there was no legal excuse for it. The extension roof; the two windows so close together—he could enter the house beyond if he willed it so.

"Yet, I have no authority," he mused. "I know of nothing wrong there; if I enter I shall be a mere trespasser. I had better go away and drop this— But what if Yettol Hammond is menaced by the shadowy danger? By Jupiter! I'll take the risk!"

Acting swiftly, he stepped out to the extension roof and moved to the other window. He tried it; he raised the lower sash. All was quiet, and the way was open. He entered the house.

He was alone in the room, and all the doors were closed. He opened that which led to the hall. Listening, he heard no sound. The house was still; he almost suspected it was deserted.

Closing the door, he moved to that at the other end of the room. It proved that it led to a passage between two rooms.

"Ah!" he murmured, "voices beyond. Who is there? I'll see!"

Carefully he opened the door until a narrow crevice was made. He looked through, and a start on his part followed.

Jonathan Case was there.

The professor stood by the side of a woman in a dress of yellow, red and black, and in one hand he held a small bottle. He was speaking.

"Now," he remarked, "we will doctor our young lady with this. Come!"

There was a slight sound behind Nathaniel, followed by a bang! The door at the rear closed heavily. He was left in the dark.

CHAPTER XXXI. DOUBLE DANGER.

Nathaniel Rand was startled for a moment by the slamming of the door, but he quickly found a reasonable way to account for it. By leaving the window open he had, of course, made way for a draught, and it was likely that the door had thus been blown to.

As Professor Case spoke the words last recorded he turned partially away, but his female companion checked him. Then came the banging of the door. They gave it but brief attention, and the woman proceeded to make known her wishes.

"Professor," she spoke, earnestly, "are you sure you have now made the compound harmless?"

"Quite sure," he answered, promptly.

"It has not been so in the past."

"Ah! but I was experimenting—experimenting."

"You have been doing that for several years, to my knowledge."

"It is different now. I have made some radical changes—I have taken out several ingredients, and added several, and the result cannot be in doubt."

"I have heard you say just this before, professor."

"Miss Trull," replied Case, with dignity, "one cannot reach great heights at a leap. Progress is often slow. I tell you I have this time brought the Oil of Hygeia to the point of success."

"I hope so, for the sake of the girl. I do not know why I am so anxious about her. I have always helped you with your schemes freely, because I, too, love science, but this time—Well, the girl is good and sweet; as noble as anybody can be who cares nothing for science, and she has touched my heart."

"Bah!" scornfully replied Case, "The daughter of a man low and dishonest!"

"I know nothing of her ancestry. Well, I have decoyed her here at your bidding, and I suppose the work must go on."

"Lead the way, at once."

"One moment, professor. Your men in this building are not to my taste. They are brutal scoundrels, and the leader, that Tom Brown, has dared to express admiration for me. He tried to dog me home yesterday. I want you to tell him that I am not to be molested. More, tell him that if he seeks to know who I am, and to meddle with me, I will shoot him—and I will do it! I am not going to have your thugs making love to me, just because you and I are interested in science."

"You shall be obeyed fully, Miss Trull. Fear not! These men shall not molest you. But let us defer action, and for now think only of the work in hand. Come!"

"Again, one moment. Let me see this Oil of Hygeia!"

The professor passed over the bottle, and she gazed at its contents musingly.

"Instrument of good or evil!" she murmured, "are you safe? Will you redeem your reputation, or does your touch mean death this hour to Yettol Hammond?"

There was wonder only in her manner. There was more in the mind of Nathaniel Rand. He had seen all of his fears realized, and it was clear that Yettol was menaced with just the peril he had feared. Terrible fact! She must be saved—but how?

He was very unwilling to confront the professor boldly. To do this was to let Case see that he knew of his villainy. For awhile longer the detective preferred to work in the dark, and any deviation from the plan now was more than dangerous to his hopes.

"Something must be done!" he mentally admitted. "Their fiendish touch shall not fall upon that innocent girl. I will save her, be the cost what it may. I am alone. What can I do? Is there any way to confront Case boldly, revolver in hand?"

Nathaniel's mind drifted to other impediments. Miss Trull had plainly stated that some of Case's men were in the house, and that Tom Brown was one of them.

The clam-bird would gladly come to his master's aid, and, if the detective had the whole gang to compete with, he could but fight a losing battle.

Jonathan Case was impatient, and he finally reached out quickly and snatched the bottle from Verona's hand.

"Come!" he repeated. "We have delayed long enough. Let us get to our work, and you shall see that I have remade the Oil of Hygeia until success is achieved. Come!"

They moved forward, and Nathaniel drew his revolver, and prepared to fling the door wide open and rush out.

Just then there was a sound behind him. It was very slight—so slight that he would not have heard it if the conversation beyond had still been in progress. As it was, it startled him. He turned his head.

As he did so, a full flood of light came, and then the rear door was flung open. He saw masked men there, and the conviction flashed upon him that he must fight his implacable foes again.

Despite the odds he was ready, and he flung up his revolver. It was a brave beginning, but he was not to succeed. His neck was suddenly encompassed by a clinging touch, and he was pulled violently backward and bent over somebody's knee.

"Silence him!" hissed a voice.

The revolver was knocked out of Nathaniel's hand, and a blow was dealt, but he moved agilely aside, and escaped it. Then he began his struggle for life.

A confused melee followed. He was held fast, but his enemies could not wholly subdue him, and the party tumbled about in the narrow passage with more ferocity than method.

Once or twice it seemed to the detective that some blows were given in his aid, but of this he could not make sure.

The end was near with him, however—a heavy blow fell upon his head and consciousness deserted him.

Time passed; how much he could not know. Then his senses returned.

He looked up and saw the room into which he had first come. He was alone there. The light struggled in and fell upon him, and it seemed to have a friendly touch. There was no sign of what was hostile, and no visible danger.

Quickly recalling the exciting scene that had been in progress when he lost consciousness, he leaped to his feet. He saw his revolver close at hand; he picked it up; it was loaded still.

Armed, he stood waiting for the next event, but the moments passed on, and nothing happened.

What had become of his foes when triumph was certain for them? They had left him as well, physically and mentally, as he ever was in his life.

"I'll look into this!" he exclaimed. "I know not what this house contains, but I am going to learn!"

Boldly he moved toward the passage again. He flung open the door beyond. The room where he had seen Jonathan Case and Verona Trull was untenanted. He continued his search; he hunted all along that floor. He next went to other floors—and, finally, he had been all over the house and found nobody.

"This is amazing!" he thought. "They cannot have dropped into the solid floor, and yet they are not here. They have left the house. Why did they go and leave me safe and well?"

House and street alike failed to answer the question, but, while he lingered near the outer door, he saw Hans Bemis half-way up the block. He motioned to him, and the man came readily.

"What's happened?" he asked, excitedly.

"How do you know anything has happened?" Nathaniel returned.

"I saw the old man and the woman leave the house on the run, and then some men scamper after them."

"What woman?" sharply cried the detective.

"Why, the one in a yellow and red dress."

Nathaniel recognized Verona Trull by the description.

"Was there not another woman?"

"No," replied Bemis.

"What happened then?"

"Well, you see I was on the street when all this happened. As soon as I saw the party skip out that way I thought there was something very wrong. I was afraid they had killed you, so I determined to keep them in sight and see where they went."

"And did you?"

"Not all of them. As soon as they were clear of the block the men all scattered—every one of them. Each took a different direction, and they went in hot haste. The woman I hung to, and I've seen here in her lair."

"Where was it?"

"Number — Houston Street."

It was the house where Verona Trull lived.

"My man, I thank you," replied Nathaniel.

"Say, was the tramp in the overcoat one of them?" eagerly asked Bemis.

CHAPTER XXXII.

STRANGE EVENTS CONTINUE.

The detective's interest suddenly increased.

"The tramp in the overcoat?" he repeated. "What do you mean?"

"Why, I saw such a man go into the house alone before the men came rushing out—say twenty minutes before that. I was surprised to see such an ill-looking fellow go in, so I noticed in particular."

"How did he go in?—openly?"

"Oh! yes, by the door. He seemed to be perfectly at home; just walked in through the front door, calm and cool, as I would to my own house. I take it he was one of the household, for he had such a cool way he couldn't be an intruder."

"Was he among those who came out?"

"I didn't see him come."

"Be more explicit in your description."

"Well, he was a man of middle age, stout and big, but not tall, and his hair and whiskers needed trimming badly. Then, there was that overcoat, which seemed so inappropriate in this warm weather."

Nathaniel was satisfied. The description fitted Diogenes Walker exactly, and it was clear that he was mixed up in the latest affray, as well as in previous ones. But was it as friend or foe?

The detective had again been rescued by mysterious friends. In the hour when

his enemies had knocked him senseless somebody had come, rescued him, and driven off the foe. He had been carried to a large room, and laid out there in a comfortable position, and with his revolver by his side.

In this affray, on which side had Diogenes Walker been arrayed?

While Nathaniel was meditating a woman appeared from the alley. She looked around anxiously, but her face brightened up at the sight of Hans Bemis. She called to him.

"Come home!" she requested. "There's a tramp in the alley, and I am frightened."

"A tramp?"

"Yes. He dropped out of the window of Sixty-six."

"Say!" exclaimed Hans, "this may be your man!"

Nathaniel and Hans hurried to the woman's side. She was Mrs. Bemis.

"Tell us all about this," the detective urged.

"Why, it's like this. I happened to look out of the window, and I saw a man come out of the next house to the extension, and then drop to the ground. He quickly slipped in behind a shanty, and there he is now. He's been there some time. He don't leave the alley, and he don't do anything but stay there. I know he is there, though I can't see him, for he hasn't passed by."

"Mister," cried Hans, "this is your chance. You can see him—say, wife, did he have on anything peculiar?"

"He wore an overcoat."

"I'll see him!"

Nathaniel strode into the alley, and the others followed.

They looked, first of all, between the shanties, and then inside of them, and, finally, poked into every crevice and corner where a man could secrete himself.

The tramp in the overcoat was not found.

When it was finally admitted that further search would be wholly useless, the two men came to a halt, and Mrs. Bemis joined them.

"Say!" exclaimed Hans, "that fellow must have had wings. I'm a lighter weight than he was, but I couldn't climb over that fence. It was put up to satisfy spite in a quarrel, and ought to stop everything but a bird. How could he get over? Was he a supernatural character?"

The detective was almost ready to believe Hans had guessed the truth, but he turned to Mrs. Bemis.

"You say the man came out of Sixty-six?"

"Yes. Right out of the window, and then dropped off of the extension to the ground."

"Was he sober?"

"Sober? Well, his legs was all right, so far as I could see. Yes, he was sober, and he moved spry as a boy."

Other questions Nathaniel asked, but he felt that he was wasting time in seeking to account for the movements of Diogenes Walker.

The detective left the premises and moved off down the street.

"Mysteriously saved again!" he murmured. "Yes, and again Diogenes Walker was around. He always is around. It seems suspicious that he boldly entered the house, like an inmate, a considerable time before I was attacked there, but this time I am not going to accuse him of being one of my foes. True, he may have saved me from the falling stone so as to press his enmity in another way—his chosen way—but I will not again regard him with hostility until I know what I am talking about."

It was a wise decision, and all the more so because it was clear that the tramp had been in the house when Nathaniel searched it. In some way Diogenes had dodged the detective on that occasion, and then, when the latter went to the front door, Diogenes dropped to the yard and made off.

"Was it he," wondered Nathaniel,

"who placed the revolver by my side, where I could get it, watched over me until I recovered, and did not leave the house until my safety was fully assured? Mysterious Diogenes Walker! Who is he? And why does he thus act as my aid and rescuer whenever the shadowy danger menaces me?"

Presently the detective aroused, and gave attention to more active branches of his case.

It could not be told with any degree of certainty whether Jonathan Case knew who had been spying upon him in the old house, but there was a shade of hope that Nathaniel's identity had remained undiscovered.

He determined to proceed under this hope, so he did not think it best to invade Verona Trull's premises for the time being.

Instead, he called a carriage and was rapidly driven toward the home of Yettol Hammond.

Reaching the house, he ascended to the higher floor hurriedly. He was not surprised at what he saw. Yettol was in her room, with her woman neighbor with her.

Yettol was laughing and crying at once, which told of a very nervous state.

"You are here!—you are unharmed!" he exclaimed.

"Safe, safe, safe!" cried Yettol, excitedly.

"Who saved you?"

"I don't know."

"How is that?"

"I was taken away; I was rescued. I know no more."

"Explain everything!" Nat urged.

It was not easy to get Yettol into condition to speak coherently, but it was done at last. She had gone to the old house with Miss Trull unsuspectingly, believing she was to get work to do. Once there she had been shut into a room, held a veritable prisoner, and used in a peremptory manner, though without actual hostility.

This continued until she heard a fight in the house. Hardly had the sounds died away when men rushed into her room. She was assured that they had come to rescue her; she was taken from the room and house, and placed in a carriage.

One man entered the vehicle with her; they were driven rapidly off, and did not pause until her home was reached.

"That is all I know," she continued.

"Who was the man that came with you in the carriage?" Nathaniel asked.

"I don't know. He was a very powerful man of about thirty years. His face was coarse and rough, and it was a face destitute of refinement in all ways, but he was as kind to me as if I had been his own sister. I asked his name, but he gently refused to tell me anything. Maybe he was a sailor; his hands were covered all over with tattooing in blue ink, with devices of ships and mermaids, and such things."

"A sailor, eh?"

"Possibly so."

"Who else did you see when you were rescued?"

"I don't know. There was another man who helped me away, but he was much like the first one. I saw nothing of the woman who decoyed me, and nobody else."

"No man in an overcoat?"

"No."

The story was told. Nathaniel asked other questions, and received as satisfactory answers as was to be expected, but they added nothing of value.

Finally, he left Yettol, with a plain warning as to possible dangers that might again come to her. She had not the slightest knowledge of the Oil of Hygeia, and he did not think it necessary to speak of it.

When Nathaniel left it was with full knowledge that he must soon make a decisive movement in return, even if his case was incomplete. It would not do to let the enemy continue their attacks.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A CONVERSATION IN THE COURT.

Once on the street Nathaniel made his way to where his fellow-detective had been posted to watch for Tom Brown, the clam-bird. The officer was still absent, much to Nathaniel's disappointment. He was determined to make a warm campaign against Tom Brown immediately. His personal safety required this, and, besides, if Brown could be captured and made to talk, the secrets of Professor Jonathan Case would fall into line rapidly.

The detective hesitated as to his proper course. There was not much probability that Brown would return to his own quarters.

He was likely to be abroad. Where?

"Just now I see no better way than to walk the streets and watch for him. I am as liable to happen on him thus as in any way. I'll try it immediately."

Nathaniel moved on. Anywhere in that vicinity the clam-bird was possibly to be found—it was his home-base, and a place he was not likely to desert wholly. The search was definitely begun.

Night was not far away. Already the dusky shadows began to enclose the streets, and the freshly-lighted lamps gave out their gloomy rays with more of ambition than effect.

An hour passed, and all that while the detective had walked on persistently. His faith was not so great as his resolution, and he was beginning to lose hope.

"My conclusions are probably wrong," he thought. "Tom Brown has had a thorough scare, and he may now keep well in-doors. He must know that to be abroad would be to invite—"

Nathaniel stopped short, looked ahead for a moment, and then stepped quickly into a doorway. He pressed back against the wall and waited.

A moment later two men sauntered past. One of the pair was Tom Brown, the clam-bird.

They had not seen him, and they passed by without a look to either side, continuing their course slowly.

He fell in behind the men, and followed where they led.

Two blocks further on they reached an alley and entered. It was a critical point in the detective's pursuit. Should he follow into the alley? A trap might lurk there.

His thoughts missed nothing, but he did not allow danger to beat him off. It was fully dark, and something might point his way in the situation inside. He passed through the alley.

Presently it widened into a sort of court. There were buildings in the rear, tumble-down old rookeries that looked unfit for human occupancy, and, as far as he could see, they had none. Between a couple of these he detected the forms of two men. Believing they were Brown and his associate, he moved forward, skulking among the shanties and working around to where he could listen.

In this he was wholly successful—the point was gained.

Brown was looking around at the old buildings.

"I can't say I like your choice of residence," he remarked. "I was born an' brought up in a shanty no better than these, but I have rose in life."

"By workin' for Jonathan Case."

"Just so. The old man has brought me in a pretty penny. He is always in need o' money, an' I have managed ter get my share of what he and I made together."

"Well, this place is not grand, but it's all the better ter keep out of sight in."

"It is all right, Joe. Well, about our new plan?"

"Be you sure it will succeed?"

"Why not?"

"It looks all right on the surface, but Nathaniel Rand has been so much attacked an' mauled about that he will be cautious, won't he? Can we trap him?"

"I have laid the plan with more care than usual. Understand, Joe, if we get

him again it ain't ter be no playin' with him, an' no monkeyin' around with the professor. Case admits that he mustn't meddle any more. He jest leaves the infernal detective ter us, an' we know what ter do."

"Ef we get him. That fellow is mighty dangerous ter our peace o' mind an' safety o' body. Say, Tom, who the dickens is it that is spoilin' all our plans?"

"I'm beat!" admitted the clam-bird. "We lay a plan all right, an' we get Rand right inter our clutches, but do we keep him? Not much! At the crisis there pops up the mysterious men. They attack us; they fight like demons; they beat us out an' rescue Rand. Who be they? It beats me, by thunder!"

"Queer!"

"Why do they do it? What is Rand ter them?"

"Give it up."

"I never was so perplexed in my life. I almost believe them rescuers are supernatural creatures. It is too much for me. They show up in a way that I can't hardly believe any human bein' could do. Ef they are human, who be they?"

"Give it up!" sighed Joe again.

"Well, there's no use o' guessin' over it. But, see here, Joe, are you ready ter make another try ter git Rand?"

"Yes."

"All right. Meet me ter-morrer mornin', an' we will start the ball movin'. Our trick is so clever it is sure ter ketch him."

"Maybe!" thought Nathaniel, in his covert.

A few words more were exchanged by the conspirators, and then they prepared to separate. Much to the detective's satisfaction, he saw that Joe was to remain in the court.

"I will stay, too!" decided Nathaniel, "and as soon as Tom Brown gets out of the way I will introduce myself to Joe. I want to have a little talk with him."

The clam-bird was slow to go. He seemed anxious about his new scheme, and, though he did not give any hint as to its nature, he gave numerous directions to his confederate calling for zeal and caution.

At last he walked off, and Joe was, as he doubtless thought, left alone.

"I'll get ter bed," he remarked, aloud. "I'm dead beat out, an' Tom is bound ter keep us humpin'. I'll get all the sleep I can."

He started to move away, but was abruptly confronted by the detective. Nathaniel squarely blocked his path.

"A word with you, Joseph," he quietly began.

"Eh? Who the blazes be you?"

"An inquisitive person. Joseph, I want to know about this mysterious business you are now engaged in. Why are you so anxious to entrap Nathaniel Rand?"

Joe had started back, and he now gave utterance to an exclamation of astonishment.

"It's the detective, hisself!" he added.

"Yes, it is I, Joseph. What of it?"

The fellow's hand strayed toward his pocket, but Nathaniel sharply ordered:

"Stop! Try to draw a weapon and you will get hurt. See here?"

He swung a revolver before the rough's eyes, and the man "saw" plainly. His hand stopped in its course.

"Say, w'ot do you mean?" he growled.

"You are a servant of Jonathan Case and Tom Brown. You have served them well and earned some money, but it is all over. Their day is past, and you want to look for a new camping-ground. Get under cover! Joseph, I want a full confession from you."

"I ain't got nothing ter confess."

"No? Think some more! I want a clear statement from you of your connection with Case and Brown. You have been in with them in all their villainy, but you are not the head-center. For this reason I will give you a chance to save yourself. Confess, give me full light, and you shall not suffer badly."

"I don't know what—"

"Why are all these attacks made on me? Why am I so painfully in the way of your masters? What do you know about the killing of Lucas Hammond? Who did it?"

"Well, say, that's cool! Who did it? I don't know. Why should I?"

"For your own safety, Joseph. Who killed Hammond?"

"Now, see here, boss, I don't—"

"Carefully, my man. You are sidling up toward me. That won't do. Keep your distance, or you'll get hurt. Keep off!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE EVIL OF THE PAST.

It was a plain warning, but Joe was too much in earnest to heed it. He was a desperate man, accustomed to broils and to risking his life, and it mattered little to him that one touch of Nathaniel Rand's finger would send a bullet through his worthless body.

He leaped boldly upon the detective.

Now, the detective did not want to part with such an important person, either by death or other means, and he forebore to fire. Instead, he met the assailant with a blow full in the face, and then, as Joe pressed upon him, he sent others the same way.

His revolver he deliberately slipped into his pocket, and then it was an equal fight.

Nathaniel had science, muscle, and agility, and he proceeded to hammer Joe in the most approved style, until the fellow was reeling and weak. Suddenly there came a cry of distress.

"Stop, stop!" exclaimed Joe. "I give in!"

"All right, my man," cheerfully returned the detective. "I haven't the least wish to harm you unnecessarily. All I want is for you to act the part of a decent man, and—well, I am not reluctant to impress upon your mind that I am able to take care of myself when I have an equal chance."

He had done it fully. Joe was reduced to a most peaceable state, and ready to submit with meekness. He said so, in substance.

"That's all right," responded Nathaniel. "I hope we shall get along in harmony after this. Now, then, what can you tell me?"

"What do ye want ter know?" asked Joe.

"You and Tom Brown have led numerous attacks against me lately. Why has it been done?"

"Because Tom an' Jonathan Case are bound ter do ye up."

"What is their reason?"

"You are a detective on the Hammond case."

"Then they fear me?"

"Boss, I ain't been let inter all this, but it looks ter me ter be very plain that somebody does fear you fer just that cause."

"What do you know about the killing of Hammond?"

Joe hesitated.

"Come, out with it. Don't stick to a sinking ship. You want to save your own bacon."

"I'll tell all I know. I've been a friend o' Tom Brown, in a certain way, a long while, but I never went around with him, nor did any jobs with him until lately. A week ago he come ter me an' said that Mousy Nelson, one o' his prime pals, had died, an' that he wanted me ter take his place."

"I did it. Then come my first job with him. One night—it was the night that Lucas Hammond was killed—I was took by Tom Brown to a point near Professor Case's house, an' told ter stand guard an' watch fer police."

"My place was at the end o' the block, an' I suppose there was somebody near me of Tom's party. Anyhow, I was ter keep them posted on when the patrolman happened along by lightin' a match, as ef I was renewin' the light o' my cigar. I did this."

"After awhile a carriage come down

the block fast. I didn't know who was in it, but when it was half way through it broke down, smash!

"The men piled out of it. I kept my place, but I thought I recognized Tom Brown as one o' them an' I watched sharply. They looked the injury over, an' then they took another man out o' the vehicle, an' carried him ter the sidewalk, layin' him partly inter a vestibule. After that they fixed up the carriage with a board under it, and trundled it off, passin' me."

"Tom Brown led that party."

"He told me my duty was over, an' so I left. That is all I know about the matter, only they left the man in the doorway, an' it was there that Hammond's body was found, a few hours after."

"Where did they get this man?" asked Nathaniel.

"I don't know."

"Wasn't it from Jonathan Case's?"

"I would tell ye ef I knew, but I don't."

"Now, see here! You are not telling the truth. You know more. Out with it!"

"It's dead honest truth that I ain't got more to say."

Joe spoke with emphasis, and if he was speaking falsely he did not weaken under fire. Nathaniel utterly failed to draw more from him.

When satisfied that nothing more was to be gained, Nathaniel took his prisoner from the court. Joe was a philosopher, and he did not once put in a plea to be released. An old hand at crime, he probably knew the folly of it, and he walked along with Nathaniel with surprising cheerfulness.

In due time he was committed to a cell, and then the detective went home and to bed. That night was one of sound sleep.

He was not yet ready to start out the next morning when he had a caller. It proved to be John White, more melancholy than ever.

"I've found out," he explained, "that Barlow Craig introduced you to me under a false name, and that you really are a detective."

"That is true."

"All right. I have come to make a confession to you."

"I shall be glad to hear your story, sir."

"I do this to leave the statement to somebody who will make good use of it. I am going away."

"Indeed! May I ask where?"

"You may ask, but I cannot tell you," answered White, sighing. "I know the start, but not the finish."

"How is that?"

"I am going to commit suicide."

"Nonsense!"

"It is true. I am tired of this sort of thing. My mind is wrecked—the result of Professor Case's Oil of Hygeia, and I am going to end my miserable career. Before I do it I want to tell you what weighs so heavily on my mind."

"Proceed, Mr. White."

"I was once a broker. When I was successful I had a great favor done me by Gabriel Redaxe, who was then just winding up his career as a detective. I ought to have been grateful—but you will see."

"When the great detective became fully blind he had some money laid by, and he thought he would invest it. He gave it to me."

"Mr. Rand, at that moment I had only the best of intentions. I fully intended to place it to good advantage, and honestly, and in a way that would bring the blind old detective in a rich harvest."

"I was tempted; I fell. Jonathan Case came to me and made an iniquitous proposal. In brief, it was that I steal the money outright, divide with him, and cover up my tracks so that my work never would be discovered."

"I was full of knowledge of the tricks of my business, but Case showed me a new one. He showed me one so cunning

that he asserted that our duplicity would never be discovered.

"I yielded. Fool that I was, I allowed the villain to tempt me, and lead me on to that act of fiendish dishonesty. I agreed. We carried out the plan. I stole the veteran's money outright, and then told him it was lost in speculation.

"There was an investigation, but it amounted to nothing. Our trick was not discovered, and no suspicion attached to us. We had the money, and Gabriel Redaxe was penniless!

"Then came the Oil of Hygeia experience, in which Professor Case ruined my brain. Why did he do it? Simply to remove me from his path. And why did he beggar Redaxe? Not from any hatred, I am assured, but because he was mad to get money for scientific experiments. That passion was all in all to him, and decency, honor, and life had to cater to it. We ruined Redaxe.

"You know my story—the cause of my melancholy—now. Do you wonder that I seek oblivion in death?"

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE CLAM-BIRD SEEKS CASH.

John White ceased, and leaned back in his chair with an air of additional melancholy. Now that Nathaniel knew his secret, he did not wonder at it.

For awhile the detective was silent.

"White," he finally exclaimed, "do you know your duty?"

"It is to die."

"Never! Your duty is to make this confession public and brand Jonathan Case as he is, and let Gabriel Redaxe know the truth."

"Every dollar of the stolen money is gone, and it would deprive Redaxe of his shelter in old age.

"He would find another shelter. I am not a rich man, but my heart and home would always be open to him. Blind veteran! he shall not suffer while I live!"

"Care for him, if you will; my recourse is to suicide."

"John White, rouse yourself. You talk nonsense. Suicide is more than folly. It is an interference with the plan of the Almighty. Let all such thoughts be banished from your mind. Brace up and be a man. Your case is not as desperate as you think. You may be shaken mentally and physically, but not half so badly as you think. There is enough of health and mental equilibrium left in you to make your future all right if you but try to do your part. Brace up!"

John White seemed to hesitate, and Nathaniel redoubled his arguments. He talked plainly and bluffly, and the caller finally weakened in his purpose. He even grew more cheerful. For the first time in years a helping hand was stretched out to him, and it was a great change. A ray of hope entered his darkened mind.

The detective could not linger with him indefinitely, but before the interview was ended he made White promise to hold himself subject to his directions, and to do nothing rash.

When the ex-broker had taken his departure, Nathaniel proceeded to take up his own trail again.

The man Joe had mentioned a place where he believed Tom Brown was likely to be found, and to this place Nathaniel intended to go at once.

Leaving the house, he walked eastward, until he was near the river. There, as Joe had described it, he found an old house of considerable size, but of advanced dilapidation, which put Doomsday Den almost into the ranks of elegance in comparison.

He was analyzing it when he chanced to notice another man near by. The discovery was surprising, for it was none other than his missing detective aid. Nathaniel hastened to join him.

"I am glad to see you!" the aid exclaimed.

"Why?"

"Tom Brown is in that house. He went in an hour ago, and I reckon he is in there now."

"Good! I am pleased to know this, for I have resolved to end the matter to-day. I shall nab Tom Brown. Have you seen anybody else around that's of interest?"

"No."

"Any idea who else is in the house?"

"No. They tell me it is a lodging house, but probably not very full."

"Do you know of any way I can get in secretly?"

"Unless they happen to see you, there is chance enough at the rear. Just go through yonder passage to the back yard and you will find all the chance you need."

"I'll try it. Do you stay here and watch. Keep your eyes and ears open. I may have a racket in there, and need help suddenly."

"I will be ready."

After some further conversation, Nathaniel tried the route his ally had named. He went through the passage and saw how easy entrance would be. Smaller buildings connected with the larger one, and made everything certain except the question of whether he would be seen by the inmates of the house.

If he was discovered, there was nothing to do but to seize the clam-bird without delay, so he proceeded boldly. Ascending one of the low buildings, he passed to the window, raised it, and entered the house.

He was then in a rickety hall, ill-smelling and dirty. There was a stillness about the house that encouraged him, and he lost no time in going further.

One after another he opened the doors, but found only vacant rooms.

"Shall I next try the lower floor or the upper one of all? The kitchen should be my last resort. I'll look up above."

He climbed the creaking stairs, and soon heard the sound of voices. The upper floor was surely tenanted, and he proceeded to get a view of the speakers.

They were in the rear room, and the easiest way seemed to be to use the front room as a position whence to reconnoiter. There was no impediment to this plan, and it was but little later that he was cautiously unclosing the connecting door a little to see who was beyond.

He succeeded. He saw two men there, and one was Tom Brown, the clam-bird.

The second man was a stranger. He was of middle age, with heavy red whiskers and a rough exterior.

"I get all the fun out o' life I kin," Tom was saying. "Wot's the use o' settin' down an' keepin' cold feet all the while?—that's wot a man does ef he don't go in an' hev his fling."

"I've had my day!" declared the man with red whiskers.

"Keep et up! You ain't old."

"I'm sick."

"You've got a touch o' fever; that's all."

"I've got the fever, an' it's bad. I've got worse. I ain't any good no more. You ask me ef I want ter go in with the boys, whoever they may be, an' make a stake. I ain't fit for it; I'm a wreck. I don't claim ter be no angel, but I should make a poor fist at business o' the sort I reckon you refer to."

Tom Brown eyed the stranger meditatively.

"Why not have a doctor?" he asked. "Or ain't you got the money?"

"Oh! I've got money enough; I'm rich enough. See here!"

He of the red whiskers displayed a handful of coins.

"A foolish thing to do!" murmured Nathaniel Rand, at the door, still watching. "If you knew Tom Brown you would not put temptation in his way."

Tom Brown suddenly leaned forward and seized the man with the whiskers. His voice sounded peremptorily:

"Say, give me that cash! I mean biz. Fork over!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE MAN OF MYSTERY.

Not alone with voice did Tom Brown present his demand. He had suddenly produced a revolver, and Nathaniel

knew it was time to interfere. He moved boldly into the room, and his command rung out sharply:

"Stop!"

The clam-bird's hand fell, and he turned to look. He saw the detective with leveled revolver, and the weapon was pointing at him.

"Let that man alone!" added Nathaniel. "You have all you can do to look out for yourself. Surrender!"

Tom Brown looked at his foe with uncertainty expressed in his face. He was not frightened, for that was not his way, but he saw the danger, and was seeking for the best way to get out of it. His expression grew ugly, and he demanded:

"What do you want?"

"You! I arrest you in the name of law!"

"Do ye?" returned Tom. "Well, I've got a word ter say."

He stopped speaking, and then sounded a shrill whistle. It went out with piercing keenness, and Nathaniel could not help knowing what it meant. He knew, too, that there was no time to lose.

He sprung toward the clam-bird.

"Yield!" he exclaimed. "I will not temporize with you!"

He grasped Tom by the shoulder, but the defiant tough sent out a blow which would have done damage had it taken effect. Nathaniel evaded it neatly, but his troubles were but just beginning.

"This way, men!" shouted the clam-bird, at the top of his voice.

He grappled with Nathaniel.

It was plain that no half-way measures would avail then, and Nathaniel acted with quickness and decision.

Deftly tripping the clam-bird he fell heavily upon him, bringing a groan from the burly rough. He had been severely shaken by the mishap, and the detective proceeded to clinch his victory. He whirled his man over and snapped irons upon his wrists.

Just then the door opened, and three other men rushed in. What they saw was not to their taste. Tom Brown lay prostrate, and Nathaniel was sitting on his chest.

The detective rose promptly, planted a foot on the fallen desperado, and faced the new-comers with leveled revolver.

"Do you want anything here?" he coolly demanded.

"At him, men!" groaned the clam-bird.

"Go to the front window and call for help!"

This was Nathaniel's direction to the man with red whiskers, but the latter stood still and stared stupidly.

"Forward!" cried one of the men by the door. "It's the infernal detective!"

"Back!" ordered Nathaniel. "I will not trifle with you. If you molest me I shall shoot!"

"Forward!" was again the cry.

They started, but again there was a surprise. Through the door rushed other men, and they delayed not in action. They flung themselves upon Tom Brown's men, and, though only two in number themselves, they bowled the gang over in a remarkable manner. Nathaniel, amazed, had nothing to do but keep his prisoner.

Was anybody else coming? Instinctively his gaze strayed toward the door, and there he caught sight of a leveled revolver and the hand that held it. The owner of the hand was concealed by the half-open door, but it was clear that he was in full command of the situation, and ready to interfere if it became necessary.

There was a cry of rage from Tom Brown. He saw his men, beaten and bruised, surrender to the lesser party, and his disgust was great. It was impotent wrath, however.

Suddenly there was another disturbance at the door. Two men came into view hastily, one precipitated half-way across the room by another, and Nathaniel was speechless with excitement.

It was his detective aid who had brought this fresh change about, and the

man he held in his grasp—the man of the revolver—was Diogenes Walker, the tramp.

"I was just in time," was the opinion expressed by the second detective. "You see this fellow was fully armed."

Diogenes Walker stood passive in his grasp.

"Hand over your weapon!" roughly added the speaker.

"Wait!" commanded Nathaniel. "Do no harm to yonder man. He is my best friend!"

A smile stole over Diogenes Walker's face. He bowed to Nathaniel with quiet amusement, and then, when the hold upon him was relaxed, calmly awaited for what came next.

"I found him beside the door, with his revolver covering those who are here," exclaimed the second detective, wonderingly.

"He covered only the Tom Brown gang, I'll assert," replied Nathaniel. "Men, secure all of the gang. Irons are scarce, but you can find ropes!"

The order was obeyed. Diogenes Walker took no part, and the man with the red whiskers sat looking on stupidly, not seeming to understand the scene.

In a short time all of the clam-bird's aids were made as helpless as himself, and the downfall of the gang was complete.

When all was done Nathaniel turned to Diogenes Walker, and there was eagerness in his manner.

"Can I see you alone?" he asked.

"Oh! ef I could get at him!" hissed Tom Brown. "That's the feller, with his shaggy hair an' overcoat, that has done all the damage when we've had you in our grip. We've had you more than once, but he always has popped up mysteriously. Who the fiends is he, anyhow?"

Thomas received no reply. Nathaniel and Diogenes were moving toward the other room. The "tramp" went without any signs of intoxication now, and his whole bearing was that of a strong man, both as to mind and body.

When the door was passed Nathaniel abruptly wheeled upon him.

"Who and what are you?" the detective demanded, eagerly.

"Diogenes Walker," was the quiet response.

"The name tells nothing. All through this affair you have been my zealous and able defender. It almost seems you have been ever by my side, though rarely seen by me. In timely and mysterious fashion you have saved me repeatedly from my foes. Who and what are you?"

"Nothing supernatural. I admit that my assumption of intoxication was nothing more than assumption. More, I have been able to help you a little, now and then."

"A little! Where would I be but for you? Why were you so interested in my welfare? Who are you?"

Nathaniel asked the questions rapidly and eagerly, but Diogenes remained grave and composed.

"I cannot well deny my work longer, when you have so much evidence, but, for now, let it answer that I am friendly to your cause. Later on—only a little later—you shall know me in full. For this occasion I must preserve my incognito. Mr. Rand, is your case well in hand?"

"I believe it is."

"Do you intend to wind it up fully soon?"

"Yes."

"Lose no time!" urged Diogenes, impressively. "Do not delay, or the shadowy danger may again get to work. Danger is abroad! Act quickly!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A LONG SILENCE IS BROKEN.

Night was falling when Nathaniel Rand passed through the gate that led to Doomsday Den and walked to the door of that old building. He knocked and Patrick Henry High appeared.

"Who is in?" inquired the detective.

"I don't know where my master is

hibernating," replied the colored man. "I think maybe he is pedestrianating for his personal hygeia. Ha, ha! Mrs. Hannah, she is in, and so is Mr. Redaxe."

"Go to Mr. Redaxe and ask if he will see me."

Patrick Henry went, and soon returned with the information that Nathaniel would be received with pleasure. The detective went up and was presently in the presence of the retired veteran.

Gabriel Redaxe sat in his usual place, as dignified and stoical as was his wont. He held his long staff, and he tapped gently on the floor with it.

"Well, young man?" he began.

"I have taken the liberty of calling on you again, sir."

"You seem to come often."

"There is a magnet that draws me, sir. It is the magnet of your past experiences, successes, fame and remarkable sagacity as a detective. To such a man I, as a beginner, pay deep homage."

"A crippled, sightless old man."

"But with mind as active as ever."

"Huff, huff!"

Gabriel Redaxe breathed his favorite, non-committal exclamation.

The caller was silent for a moment, and then he resumed:

"Mr. Redaxe, you know that I am on the Hammond case; we have mentioned it often before. Allow me to ask if you have anything to suggest to me, or anything to explain."

The veteran was duly attentive, but he showed no surprise or, indeed, unusual interest.

"How is your case progressing?" he inquired.

"As well as I could expect."

"Are your mysteries solved?"

"I may say that I have them somewhat arranged. Now, Mr. Redaxe, you have lived in this house. You were here when Lucas Hammond was a guest; you were here when the body was found on this block. You are afflicted with blindness, but you are still keen of observation and acute in all ways. Have you gained tidings of nothing that will help me?—nothing that will point to the proper solution of the mystery?"

The veteran suddenly raised his hand. It hovered for a moment in air; then he leveled a finger toward the door. Then his hand moved swiftly to his lips, hovering there suggestive.

Nathaniel understood; he was warned that there was a spy at the door, a listener to their conversation.

Gabriel Redaxe did not hesitate for more than a second; he spoke in his usual direct, decisive way.

"I shall have to refer you to my cousin, sir—to Professor Case. He has eyes; I have none. He has kept in touch with the world; I am a hulk laid on the shelf. Go to Professor Case with your inquiries, sir. He is a man eminent in science, and his position is assured. I refer you to my cousin, the professor."

The door opened softly and Jonathan Case himself appeared. He was outwardly calm, but his usually pale face was flushed, and his eyes shifted in a peculiar manner in the minutes that followed.

"Good evening, Mr. Rand," he spoke in a clear, even voice. "I am pleased to see you again. Have you just arrived?"

"Only a short time ago, professor."

"It is well. I have been wishing to see you, as I have learned something about Basil Bowen, the murderer. Will you oblige me by going to my laboratory?"

"Certainly, sir."

Nathaniel spoke readily. If he had looked at Gabriel instead of at the professor, he would have seen a very plain motion commanding him to refuse. The motion passed unseen by either of the other men, and the veteran had motioned for nothing.

"Come!" calmly directed Case.

Nathaniel turned toward the door. Just then he heard an unusual stir by the chair of the blind man. He turned. Gabriel Redaxe had risen to his feet, and

his strong face was marked with an expression of redoubled power and resolution.

"Stop!"

The veteran's voice sounded clear and firm. Both Case and Nathaniel turned to him wonderingly.

"I forbid it!" added Redaxe steadily. "The laboratory is not the place for you, young man!"

A wave of unrestrained anger was expressed on Jonathan Case's face. It was gone in a moment, and he was calm as ever.

"What do you mean, cousin?" he replied mildly.

"Nathaniel Rand will not go to your laboratory."

"Why not?" instinctively asked the detective.

"Because if you do you will die there!"

Jonathan Case's eyes were blazing.

"Die!" he echoed.

"Die!" repeated the veteran. "You have set a trap there for him. If you can lure him into the laboratory he will die from some device of yours. He will not go!"

"This is remarkable language!" cried the professor, his voice rising to a shrill pitch.

"It is a remarkable crisis, sir."

"And you—you dare to tell this man I would harm him!—you dare to set yourself against me!—to defy me!" almost gasped Case.

"I dare!"

"You—you shall pay for this!"

"I can pay no other way than to forfeit my life, and it is only that of a worn-out old man. Come what will, I shall speak plainly. Nathaniel Rand, I warn you that death lurks in that laboratory! The way of it I know not, but heed you the warning."

"And you—you say this!" panted the professor.

"Jonathan Case, we may as well understand each other now," the veteran went on, in an unshaking voice. "I have lived for years under your roof. When I came here I supposed you to be an honorable man, and I was grateful to you for the shelter offered when I was blind and helpless. I know now that I owe you no debt of gratitude."

"There are many things I could tell about you, but some of them do not apply directly here. I know now that you made the trouble between me and my sister Thersey. You lied to her, turned her against me, and made her hate me when I would have been her friend. She was much younger than I, but her father was mine, too. She died not knowing of your plots, but her daughter lives; I shall see Yettol reconciled to me before I die."

"Why did I need the shelter you offered me? It was because you stole the money that was mine—the money I had saved for my old age, but unfortunately handed to John White to invest. I know that fact well now."

"You did all this because you were mad to get money for use in your experiments—money that you always sunk."

"As for these later events—this episode concerning Lucas Hammond—it is all clear to me—"

"Stop!" cried the professor. "Utter another word and you shall suffer for it!"

"Brave man!" commented Gabriel.

"He threatens the blind!"

"He shall do no harm!" exclaimed Nathaniel. "I am here, I am your defender, Gabriel Redaxe."

The detective went close to the veteran and stood in defiance.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE FINAL REVELATIONS.

The professor's eyes were gleaming brightly now.

"We will see!" he exclaimed. "Come!"

The last word was added in a shout, and the door opened again and admitted another man. Nathaniel was astonished. It was Tom Brown, the clam-bird, whom he had left in the hands of the police

only a few hours before. Jonathan Case quickly pointed to Nathaniel.

"Disable or kill that accursed detective!" he ordered.

"I am your man!" agreed Tom, with a scowl. "I'm just hankerin' ter git at him!"

He pressed forward, but Gabriel Redaxe again spoke.

"Stop! I know not who is here, but I can guess in part. I have a man to present to your notice. Andrew Baldwin, come forth!"

The door of the adjacent wardrobe opened and Diogenes Walker stepped into sight of all. He came with a revolver in each hand, and the muzzles bore upon Jonathan Case and his follower. Never before in Nathaniel's experience had the so-called Diogenes looked so stern and aggressive.

"Stand where you are!" he commanded. "If either of you moves a hand to do harm here I shall shoot him!"

It was a plain warning, and even Tom Brown was ready to stand still.

"I think," pursued the man with the revolvers, "that the mutiny is quelled. Mr. Redaxe, have you anything more to say?"

"Perhaps," suggested the veteran, "Nathaniel Rand has a word to speak at this juncture."

"I have!" quickly agreed the detective. "I came her to-night on no idle purpose. I am here to arrest Jonathan Case!"

The professor's face twitched nervously for a moment, and then a peculiar smile stole over his features.

"Judging from your pet case and brazen hostility I presume it is on charge of having murdered Lucas Hammond."

"No!"

"No?" returned the professor, with an air of surprise.

"Lucas Hammond is not dead! He lives!"

A strange sound escaped Case's lips. It may have been relief or regret; it was surely surprise and confusion.

"From the first," pursued Nathaniel, "I have had doubts as to the identity of the man found in the vestibule. The body was cold when found, and, when I questioned the doctor, he gave it as his opinion that life had been extinct at a time when I had proof that Lucas Hammond was alive."

"Then there was the singular burn on the dead man's face and head—a burn that made his identity a question—but spared his beard while defacing him in all other ways. I doubted a burn that began and ended so abruptly. I questioned doctors to see if they thought this could have been accident. Their replies convinced me that he was burned by design, and after death."

"With such plain clues I have worked to the end of finding Hammond alive, and proving that the dead man was somebody else. I have succeeded. I now know the plot in full."

"Hammond came here with the diamonds he had smuggled into the country. He foolishly decided to get your help to dispose of them, thinking you were a celebrated man, and knowing you were none too honest. He was yet to learn just how evil you were."

"When you saw the diamonds, with their great value, you were mad to possess them."

"Hammond foolishly fell asleep in your laboratory. While he slept you gave him a drug—perhaps chloroform; I know not the exact thing used—and applied the Oil of Hygeia."

"He awoke with the deadly stuff shooting through his blood. From that moment his fate was sealed. His mind was wrecked."

"You had arranged all in advance. For years one Tom Brown had been your follower. Governed by you he headed a gang of thieves, and the proceeds of their plunder had kept money in your pocket. Tom Brown aided you to get rid of Lucas Hammond. He was taken to the lower part of the city and turned

adrift to die or starve, or go fully crazy, as the case might be."

"Further, you had secured the body of another man—one James Brandt—and this body you prepared to deceive the public. You wanted it to seem that Hammond was dead. You did not know he had a living daughter, and you thought you would be his legal heir in common with Gabriel Redaxe."

"You used an acid and burned the other man's face, and then dressed him in Hammond's butternut-colored suit of clothes. Thus, you made him look like Hammond."

"It was your plan to leave the body remote from this house, but the carriage broke down on this very block and frustrated that part of it. The body had to be left where it could be."

"All this I can prove. One of your gang has confessed all."

"One thing more. From the first I have been looking for the real Lucas Hammond. I found him this morning. Chance led Tom Brown to take refuge in the house where Hammond, weak, sick, and mentally wrecked, was living his painful life. I went there this morning, I repeat, to find Brown. I also found a man with red whiskers whose appearance interested me from the first. It was Hammond. He lives, but his days are few. He will die of the Oil of Hygeia."

Nathaniel paused briefly, and Gabriel Redaxe broke in deeply:

"Compound of ill omen! It was always a thing of terror. Professor Case aspired to invent a medley of drugs that would make mankind proof against disease. He has worked over it for many years, making frequent changes, for it never was a success. The trouble was that the foundation drug was fatal to the reason of man. It destroyed the minds of those inoculated, and generally their health."

"So, all through the years he worked on, changing, adding, taking away, but always keeping the one fatal drug without which he could not, he believed, hope for success."

"Nathaniel Rand, when you went on this case to solve the mystery of the dead man of the block—I knew then that you would be in danger. The man died from an accident, and it was Case's plan to have it known; but the fact that Basil Bowen was arrested by the body gave the thing the look of murder. You were put on the case. From that time the professor's plans were in danger."

"Well did I know what would ensue. He would summon Thomas Brown and his gang; he would try to entrap you, and if he succeeded, you were just as sure to get the Oil of Hygeia in your veins as life itself—the professor would miss no chance to experiment."

"Then it was you who wrote the warning letter to me?" cried Nathaniel.

"It was I. As much out of touch with the world as I have been, I have kept up communication with one old friend, a fellow detective who retired some years ago because he was rich. His name was Andrew Baldwin. I sent for him; I bade him enter the field and watch over you at all times. He was not to interfere with your case, or seek to solve any mystery himself, but simply watch over you and save you from all possible danger."

"He disguised himself as a tramp and called himself Diogenes Walker. This man—this old, skillful detective, is here!"

"Minus my overcoat and appearance of intoxication!" added "Diogenes," smiling. "Mr. Rand, as an old hand at detective work, I want to say you have done well in this case. I congratulate you."

"Last of all," added Gabriel Redaxe, "I have all along been keenly interested in your work, Mr. Rand. I have not dared to speak out here, for Jonathan Case had a habit of listening at the door. Luckily, my hearing was keen, and when I heard him there I always began to act harshly toward you, and to eulogize him. I have now broken my silence of years. I have cast off the only

home I had, but I will trust to Providence to see me through my life."

"Providence will do it!" exclaimed Nathaniel, "and it will make me its instrument. I give you admiration and friendship, which I can but poorly express. I will supply you with a home while we both live."

"I guess I shall get one, too," commented Tom Brown. "Only two hours ago I escaped from my captors, but I seem bound for the same melancholy road now."

Jonathan Case folded his arms and kept silent. His day was past.

"One thing we forgot," pursued Nathaniel; "I believe the diamonds are in the house. I will look for them."

He looked, and found them cunningly concealed.

The game was at an end. Jonathan Case and Tom Brown were taken to Police Headquarters. In due time they and their confederates were tried and sent to prison on long terms. The professor's scientific days are over.

Barlow Craig, well cared for, recovered, and John White was given a helping hand, so that he is once more a man of some value to himself and others. It was Gabriel Redaxe's wish.

Basil Bowen, fully exonerated, was released from confinement, and, needless to say, signalized the happy result by marrying Yettol without delay.

Lucas Hammond lingered a few weeks and then died.

The diamonds proved all that had been expected for them, and, when the duty was duly paid, there was enough left to make Yettol a rich woman. She was not the only one who benefited by the smuggler's wealth. She learned to know of the noble nature of Gabriel Redaxe, her uncle, so she gladly took him to her comfortable home.

Andrew Baldwin returned to his retirement, well pleased with his brief experience in detective work in such a novel role, and Diogenes Walker is seen no more.

Nathaniel Rand has made rapid progress in his profession, but never has he since had a case so thrillingly interesting as that when the Oil of Hygeia was a factor and he was menaced by the shadowy danger.

THE END.

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